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NAVAL POST GRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**NEGOTIATING PEACE WITH THE MORO ISLAMIC
LIBERATION FRONT IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

by

Ariel R. Caculitan

December 2005

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Aurel Croissant
Michael Malley

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**NEGOTIATING PEACE WITH THE MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT
IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

The peace negotiation between the Government Republic of the Philippines and the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front which started in 1997 during the time of former President Fidel V. Ramos went through turbulent times in the year 2000 when the succeeding President, Joseph Estrada, failed to continue the momentum of the peace initiative and instead declared an “all out war” in dealing with the rebel group. When Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became president in 2001, she turned the “all out war” policy into an all out peace, which opened up hopes for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Peace negotiations between the GRP and the MILF were resurrected and both sides have re-affirmed their commitment to a negotiated political settlement as the only solution to the conflict. This thesis analyzes the prospect for a sustainable peace between the GRP and MILF by looking at the following variables: (1) the conflict and its ripeness for resolution, (2) the ongoing peace process, and (3) the involvement of external actors. General findings of this study indicate a good prospect for a comprehensive peace agreement next year and a good chance for its implementation due to the favorable conditions cited in this thesis.

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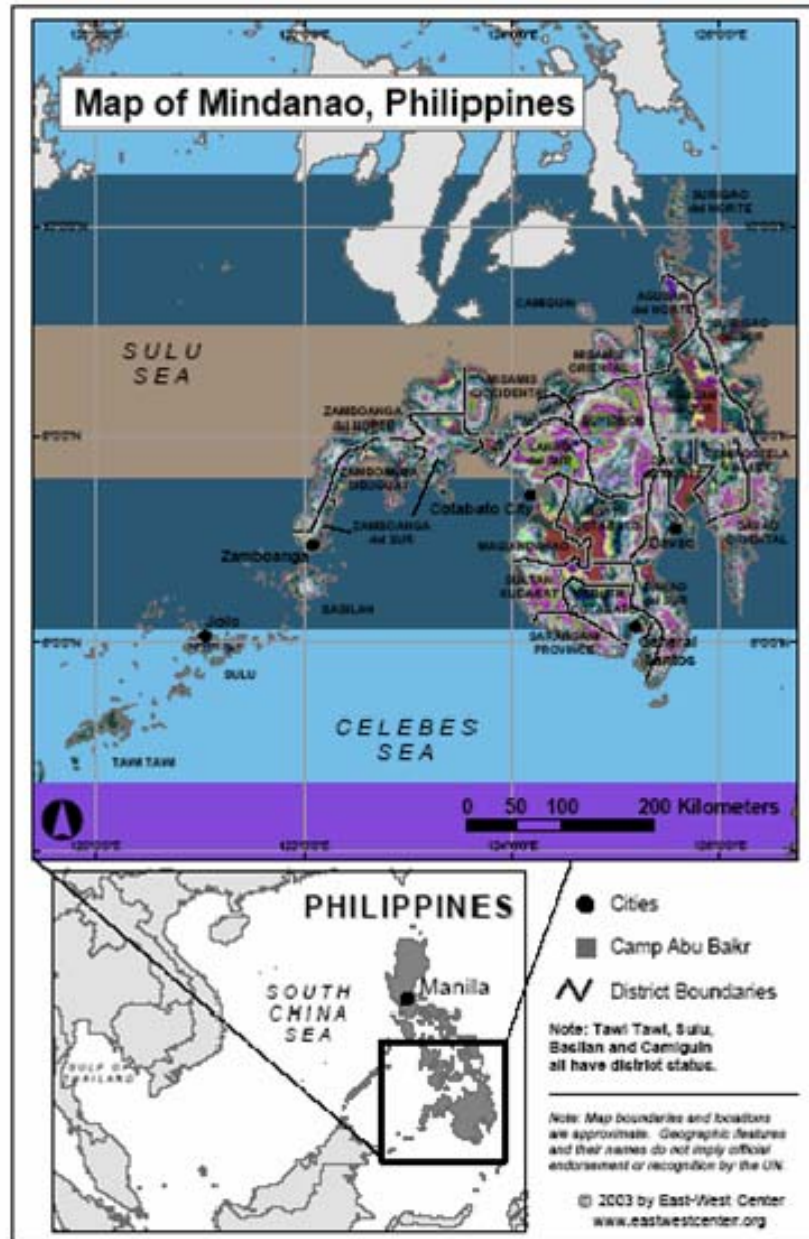
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Map 1. Map of Mindanao [from: <www.eastwestcenter.org.]

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The southern Philippines has been greatly affected by the problem of Muslim secessionist insurgency for more than three decades now.¹ The Moro (Filipino Muslim) armed struggle, which originated from a combination of socio-political factors in the early 20th century exploded in the early 1970s and persisted through waves of violence that had its peak again in the year 2000. In this independence struggle, two main rebel factions have emerged and one small terrorist group: the secular nationalist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), established by Nur Misuari in 1971² which forged a final peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1996;³ the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), whose main goal is to establish an independent Islamic state, a breakaway group from the MNLF established officially in 1980 by Salamat Hashim⁴; and the small Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) which is advocating an exclusive theocratic Islamic state founded by Abdurajak Janjalani in 1989. The ASG is known for its religious intolerance and violence against Christians,⁵ but it deteriorated into a high profile kidnap-for-ransom group after the death of its founder in 1998.

The GRP-MNLF peace agreement in 1996 resulted in a split among MNLF members who were willing to compromise independence and those who were not. Some

¹ Rizal G Buendia. "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Ethno-Religious War or Economic Conflict?," in *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in South East Asia*, eds. Aurel Croissant, Sacha Kneip, and Beate Martin (forthcoming), 3.

² Ibid.

³ In September 1996, the Philippine government under President Fidel V Ramos successfully reached a Final Peace Agreement (FPA) with the MNLF. This agreement provided for the Moros' wider political and economic powers through the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Southern Philippines Council for Development (SPCPD). Rizal G Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Ethno-Religious War or Economic Conflict?," in *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in South East Asia*, eds. Aurel Croissant, Sacha Kneip, and Beate Martin (forthcoming); Ronald J. May, "Muslim Mindanao: Four Years After the Peace Agreement," in *South East Asian Affairs*, (2001); Ricardo A. David, NPS MA Thesis paper on "The Causes and Prospects of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Movement," (2003).

⁴ Peter Chalk, "Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh," in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 24:241-269, (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 247.

⁵ Ibid., 248.

MNLF members joined the government through the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao and the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, and those who did not agree with the compromise joined the MILF. As a result, the MILF eventually gained more members reaching as high as 15,000⁶ and became the primary vanguard of the Moros' struggle for independence. In the year 2000, the conflict between the government and the MILF reached its peak. Heavy fighting erupted costing the lives of 200 soldiers,⁷ 47 civilians, an unaccounted number of Muslim rebels, and about 160,000 families displaced.⁸ The fighting caused the destruction of several MILF major camps, including its main camp Abubakar in Maguindanao. However, its tactical defeat by government forces did not stop the MILF from conducting guerilla attacks and the situation from deteriorating. When Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became President in 2001, she offered a ceasefire and invited the MILF rebels to the peace negotiation. After several exploratory talks through the mediation of Malaysia and Libya, both the GRP and the MILF agreed to the following substantive agenda: security, rehabilitation and ancestral domain.⁹ However, peace negotiations had been shaken by incidents of fighting between the soldiers and rebels in early 2003. Nevertheless, the peace initiatives managed to continue in mid 2003. Since then, the peace dialogue between the GRP and the MILF has slowly been progressing.

⁶ Chalk, 247.

⁷ Numbers of deaths on the MILF side is not available but it is widely believed that they have suffered heavy losses in the fighting when several of its camps were assaulted and overrun by the military in 2000. Ricardo A. David, NPS M.A. Thesis paper on "The Causes and Prospects of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Movement." (2003), 103.

⁸ Fermin Adriano et al, "Mindanao's Agenda for Peace and Development" cited from Rizal G Buendia, The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Ethno-Religious War or Economic Conflict?, in *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia*, eds. Aurel Croissant, Sacha Kneip, and Beate Martin (forthcoming), 7.

⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG) Asia Report N 80, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process," (2004), 7, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2863&l=1> (accessed 02 Sept 05).

B. PURPOSE

This thesis paper examines the prospects for a sustainable peace between the Government Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in view of the ongoing peace initiatives of both sides with the support of Malaysia, the U.S., and other external actors. For this purpose, sustainable peace is defined as a relatively peaceful condition wherein both the GRP and the MILF remain committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict and will stay cooperatively peaceful in the future implementation of a final peace agreement. Failure to achieve a sustainable peace condition between the GRP and MILF would likely result in the resumption of violence. The three decades of fighting in Muslim Mindanao has already submerged the region and its people into deep poverty and lawlessness. It is also feared that Mindanao may become a major breeding ground for terrorist groups due to the growing presence of a regional terrorist group called Jemaah Islamiyah¹⁰ if the MILF conflict is not peacefully resolved.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Literature on the Nature of Conflict, Causes, and Recommendations

The MILF insurgency is mainly a case of an ethno-nationalistic conflict between the majority Christians and the minority Muslims in the Philippines as the former has dominated the latter over the past decades. According to Paul Collier, ethnic dominance ranging from 45% to 95% is as prone to a civil conflict as a homogenous society is. He states that “having 45 percent or more of the population is sufficient in a democracy to give the group permanent control.”¹¹ This being the case, the minority may suffer from exploitation because of limited political powers and the resources from the minority may be captured by the majority. Such conditions of potential exploitation create fear among

¹⁰ Jemaah Islamiya is a regional terrorist group whose goal is to establish an Islamic state centered in Indonesia. It was founded by two Indonesian clerics Abu Bakar Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar who have been very much influenced by the puritanical Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. CRS Report for U.S. Congress, “Terrorism in South East Asia,” (5 Oct 2004), 17-21, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/35595.pdf> (accessed 13 Oct 05).

¹¹ Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Conflict;” in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, eds. Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. (Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 155.

the minorities which may eventually drive them to fight.¹² In the Philippines, Christians dominate the country, having 92% of the population, of which 89% are Catholics, while the Muslims comprise only around 4.5%.¹³ The Muslims are concentrated in the Mindanao region, southern part of the country and known as the conflict area, where they are 18% of the total population.¹⁴ Today, Muslim majority populations are mainly concentrated in five out of the 25 provinces in Mindanao, namely: Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindano, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, and one city, Marawi.¹⁵ Some of the main issues of the conflict are the political marginalization and landlessness of the minority Muslims. Andrew Tan referred to the huge influx of Christian migrants in the early to mid-20th century that caused the disadvantaged Muslims to lose their lands through dubious legal means or outright confiscation.¹⁶

Robert Gurr argues that an ethno-nationalistic struggle is potentially explosive due to the strong shared identity of members and leaders who see a collective incentive for their political action. Their capacities to launch a collective action and the opportunities in their political environment also increase the intensity of their struggle.¹⁷ In this conflict, the Moro identity served to be the unifying factor for the Filipino Muslims who perceive themselves as being treated unjustly by the majority Filipino Christians. By seceding Mindanao, they can establish their own political powers and benefit from the region's natural resources. The capacity of the Moros to launch an armed struggle was also heightened by the fact that they are concentrated in areas of Mindanao and also due to the involvement of external supporters.

¹² Collier, 155.

¹³ CIA World Factbook, "Philippines," <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/rp.html#People> (accessed 05 Sept 05).

¹⁴ Nathan Quimpo, "Options in the Pursuit of Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in the southern Philippines," *Asian Survey*. Vol. 41, No.2. (Mar-Apr 2001).

¹⁵ "Mindanao Data," *Wikipedia: Free encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindanao> (accessed 08 Oct 05).

¹⁶ Andrew Tan, "Armed Muslim separatist in South East Asia: Persistence, Prospects and Implications" in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (Francis & Taylor, 2000), 271.

¹⁷ Robert Gurr, "Minorities and Nationalists: Managing Ethno Political Conflict in the 20th Century," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International conflict*, eds. Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 167.

Similarly, Rizal G. Buendia argues that the “centralism of the state that restricts Muslim self governance, socio-economic deprivation and the historical biases and prejudices between Muslims and Christians are the causes of the ethnic minority Muslim’s armed struggle for secession.”¹⁸ The highly centralized political structure and administration have not provided substantial political powers to the ethnic Muslims and have seemingly marginalized the Muslims from having greater political powers, both at local and national levels. The national government in Manila has also caused the socio-economic deprivation of the Muslims in Mindanao by failing to bring economic development in the area. Malapit, et al, explain this widespread poverty in Mindanao as having a strong linkage with violent conflict and a more likely occurrence of chronic poverty.¹⁹

In view of his arguments, Buendia endorsed the need for providing greater political powers to the Muslim minorities. He is supportive of the current debate in the Philippines for a constitutional change. That is, changing the current system of Presidential unitary government into a parliamentary-federal government. This will provide a separate state to the Bangsamoro people where they can exercise greater political powers and economic jurisdictions.

Fianza emphasizes the ancestral land issue as a major cause for the recurring conflict in Mindanao. She argues that “conflict is rooted to the land question triggered by the issue of equitable access to land and resources or rights to a territory that contesting groups view should be acquired or reclaimed not solely on the basis of economic rights to private property in the western liberal sense, or from a more progressive standpoint of redistributive reform, but as a determinant of the survival of a community and their culture, the basis of their identity as a people.”²⁰

¹⁸ Buendia, 2.

¹⁹ Hazel Malapit et al, “Does Violent Conflict Make Chronic Poverty more likely? The Mindanao Experience” (2003), 12, <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/conferencepapers/malapit.pdf> (accessed 10 May 05).

²⁰ Myrthena L Fianza, “Contesting Land and Identity in the Periphery: The Moro Indigenous People of Southern Philippines” <http://www.iascp2004.org> (accessed 10 May 2005).

Eleanor Dictaan-Bang-oa discusses contemporary efforts aimed at peace building and sustainable development in Mindanao that began after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA) between the GRP and the MNLF.²¹ She notes the economic initiatives undertaken by UNDP, World Bank, USAID, and GRP in support of achieving sustainable peace. These involved infusions of financial aid to livelihood projects. However, these efforts were hampered by both internal and external factors in the post-conflict environment that followed. She cites the difficulty brought about by the damaged social capital problem. The capability to trust, among others, was damaged by the long years of conflict and deception. Sadly, former MNLF commanders who came into power proved to be ill equipped to run an effective administration. Furthermore, corruption took center stage among many Muslim officials, thus complicating the bureaucratic process of the already slow implementation of economic support.²² Nonetheless, there are also success stories like the ELAP-USAID seaweed farming project in Sulu, the multi-purpose cooperative, and the SPCPD-UN-NEDA Livelihood Assistance Project.²³ In her recommendation, she also focused on the “recognition of the indigenous peoples’ right to own, manage and control their lands and resources” as the main issue to address.

Despite the disruption of the ceasefire in 2003, the GRP and the MILF have been able to advance the talks on the substantive agenda of security, rehabilitation, and ancestral domain that were outlined in the 2001 Tripoli agreement. The Tripoli accord has become the mother agreement in which the three cited agenda would be addressed and hopefully result in a political settlement. Issues for political settlement include granting independence to majority areas of the Moros and giving expanded autonomy, or accommodating a Bangsamoro state under a new Federal Republic of the Philippines. So far, the first two agenda were easily resolved and the only remaining agenda of the three is the issue of ancestral domain, which is considered complex and contentious.²⁴ Having

²¹ Eleanor Dictaan-Bang-oa, “The Question of Peace in Mindanao, Southern Philippines” (2004), 154, <http://www.undp.org/csco/resource/cso> (accessed 10 May 05).

²² Ibid, 161.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ International Crisis Group (ICG) Asia Report, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process,” (13 July 2004), <http://www.icg.org> (accessed 01 Aug 05).

included the land issue in the peace negotiation today provides a better chance for the resolution of the conflict because this issue had not been addressed in the past peace negotiations with the MNLF, and considering it remains a valid and crucial issue of today.

Col. Ricardo David recognizes the ethno-nationalistic and socio-economic dimensions of the Moro insurgency. He is convinced that the solution to the problem is a political settlement coupled with developmental assistance. “Unless these are addressed by the GRP and the MILF in the current negotiations, the Moro nationalistic struggle will continue to remain a problem.”²⁵ Col. Ricardo Morales pointed at flawed governmental approaches to the Moro insurgency as to why it has been going on for more than three decades now. Accordingly, the government failed to seize the opportunity to end the conflict after the rebels were weakened by military combat operations in the mid-1970s.²⁶ In view of the year 2000 major offensives by the military, wherein the MILF has been weakened, the current peace process is now an opportunity for the government to end the conflict.

2. General Writings on Conflict Settlements

Analyzing peace settlements between parties in conflict is a complex undertaking due to the peculiarity of each case of conflict under study. However, studies showed that certain variables are causal to the success and failure of peace settlements. In his analysis, Fen Osler Hampson observes a causal relationship of the following independent variables to the success and failure of peace settlements: first, ripeness of conflict; second, role of a third party facilitator; third, the quality of a peace agreement; and fourth, the role played by a great power. The “role of ripeness” refers to Zartman’s condition of a “hurting stalemate” reached by the adversaries in the conflict. In this condition, the conflict has reached a point where both sides realize the futility of using force to gain unilateral

²⁵ Ricardo A. David, NPS MA Thesis paper on “The Causes and Prospects of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Movement,” (2003), 118-119, Dudley Knox Library Bosun electronic Files http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/cgisirsi/Fri+Nov+18+13:57:53+PST+2005/SIRSI/0/518/0/03Dec_David.pdf/Content/1?new_gateway_db=HYPERION (accessed 10 Jun 05).

²⁶ Ricardo C. Morales, NPS MA Thesis, “Perpetual Wars: The Philippine insurgencies,” (2003), 50, Dudley Knox Bosun files, <http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/cgisirsi/ocBpBw5GJM/SIRSI/47190056/523/5584> (accessed 15 Jun 05).

advantage and thus become open to considering peace negotiations. This may also be caused by the deterrence effect of “a looming catastrophe” wherein the leaders fear the situation may deteriorate to uncontrollable and large scale violence.²⁷ In the case of the MILF conflict, the peak of the fighting in 2000 and its outcome have made the GRP and the MILF commit to a negotiated political settlement as the only solution to the problem. This realization of both sides provides the motivation to look into the conflict and find out if it has reached the condition of a “hurting stalemate.” Secondly, “a looming catastrophe” condition may be present because the major battles in 2000 may have revived the inclination of both ethnic groups in conflict to resort to sectarian violence that had occurred in the early 1970’s.

The “role of a third party facilitator” is equally important as it serves as a crucial catalyst in developing supportive relationships between adversaries that may lead to de-escalation of conflict. It helps both sides realize their ownership of the problem that should be solved collaboratively and no longer as a “contest to be won.”²⁸ The third party can facilitate in many ways: “restructuring and sequencing issues, identifying alternatives, changing adversaries’ perspectives, building trust, offering incentives, or threatening penalties or sanctions in case of non-compliance to the agreement made.”²⁹ In this regard, it is important to look into the significance of Malaysia as a facilitator and how committed it is in bringing about peace in Mindanao.

Regarding the “quality of peace agreement,” it is important that the peace agreement covers the wide range of issues to the conflict because this will affect its durability.³⁰ Hampson cited Holsti’s recommendation that “the terms of peace settlement must be carefully scrutinized in order to assess whether it is sufficiently comprehensive and sustainable to prevent, or otherwise deter new challenges that has just been

²⁷ William Zartman, cited in Fen Osler Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Agreement Succeed or Fail* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 1996), 14.

²⁸ John Burton, cited in Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Agreement Succeed or Fail*. (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 1996), 12.

²⁹ Fen Osler Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Agreement Succeed or Fail*. (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 1996), 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

created.”³¹ This makes a valid point because a badly designed peace agreement is likely to be a main source of failure in implementing and sustaining the terms of the accord. He, however, cautioned that a good peace agreement is as bad as the others if there will be failure in the implementation. Right now, there is no final peace agreement yet between the GRP and the MILF. However, the peace process is ongoing and it has reached several agreements already prior to reaching a comprehensive one. Hence, it is appropriate to look into the progress of the peace process at this stage and how likely it is that there would be a peace agreement.

Lastly, the “role of a great power” is crucial to the compliance of the adversaries because of the incentives it can provide, the strong influence it has over the adversaries and its capability to pressure client states and parties in the conflict.³² The issue of implementation is indeed a critical phase in the history of past peace agreements with the Moro rebels in the case of the MNLF. The 1976 Tripoli agreement between the GRP and MILF failed in its implementation and the 1996 agreement is hardly a success as of this time. In both implementations of these agreements, there was no direct participation of a major power. In this regard, it is important that this study looks on the probability that a major power will be involved in the implementation phase of the GRP-MILF peace agreement and how likely will it be committed to bringing about peace in Mindanao. Hence, it would be interesting to look into the probability that the United States, which has been asked by the GRP and the MILF to participate in the peaceful resolution of the conflict, will assist in the implementation phase.

Stedman saw the difficulty of ending civil wars due to the conditions of the implementation environment and the poor commitment of third parties to provide resources and troops in the post-conflict implementation phase of the agreement.³³ The difficulty of the environment is mainly due to the spoilers who may be local or external actors who are not benefited in the peace settlement. Given the presence of spoilers, the

³¹ Hampson, 2.

³² Ibid., 17.

³³ Stephen John Stedman, “Introduction” in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stedman, Stephen John, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens (U.S.A. & U.K.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 2-3.

“implementers,” which may refer to the peace keeping force, will have to be strong and robust to deter them from disrupting the process. However, states will not always be willing to give resources and troops if such undertakings do not serve the interest of the participating country.³⁴ Commitment of third parties is driven by its personal interests. In most cases, it is strong when they see that the conflict is vital to its own security or may have some disadvantageous effect on its own country.³⁵ This explains why Malaysia and the U.S have shown greater interest in assisting in the peaceful resolution of the MILF conflict. Along this line, this thesis paper looks at the security interest of Malaysia and the U.S which have shown greater interest in assisting in the peaceful resolution of the MILF conflict. Malaysia is a neighbor country which may have been affected in the past by the conflict, while the U.S. is currently engaged in the global war on terror that has something to do with the Mindanao conflict.

Walter emphasizes the critical role of third parties in making adversaries in the conflict comply with their agreements especially on the issue of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants because they provide the security guarantee that no one will be harmed and agreements will be implemented.³⁶ Down and Stedman cite the critical importance of a major power’s support owing to its capability to support the peace track or disrupt the peace when it considers the agreement hostile to its interest. Certainly, major powers have the resources to spare and the military capability to coerce adversaries in the implementation.

Prendergast and Plumb underscore the importance of civil society organizations in bringing about the peace implementation at the grassroots level, owing to its capability to penetrate the local communities.³⁷ Woodward emphasizes the importance of reviving the economy so that people may see a peace dividend which would make them develop a

³⁴ Stedman et al, 2-3.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁶ Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization* 51, no.3 (summer 1997), 340, cited from Stedman et al, 5.

³⁷ John Prendergast and Emily Plumb, “Building Local Capacity: From Implementation to Peacebuilding,” in *Ending Civil War: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stedman, Stephen John, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens, (U.S.A. & U.K.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 327-330.

strong commitment to peace. She cited the importance of funds in supporting post-conflict programs, especially demobilization and re-integration of combatants.³⁸

Harold H. Saunders emphasizes “the human dimension of conflict as central to peace making and building peaceful societies. Only governments can write peace treaties, but only human beings, citizens outside government, can transform conflictual relationships into peaceful relationships.”³⁹ This relates to the conflict in Muslim Mindanao. According to Fr. Bert Layson, the issue in the Mindanao conflict is not only political and economic. The conflict “has something to do with the way people look at themselves: the way they interpret their history, religion and culture; the way they look at their neighbors, their officemates, their fellow farmers, their classmates and even their friends.”⁴⁰ He cited the cases of a Muslim boy who would like to become a rebel in order to fight the military, and a Christian boy who would like to become a soldier in order to fight the rebels. “Hatred, prejudices, biases, and distrust, among others, are the little wars that are going on in the hearts of Muslims, Christians and indigenous people of Mindanao.”⁴¹ Along this line, Janice Gross Stein states that “the identities that shape images are not given but are socially reconstructed as interactions develop and contexts evolve over a trajectory of a conflict. Change in identity can reshape images, and changing images can provoke a reconstruction of identity.”⁴² Accordingly, it would help the peace makers to be more effective in addressing interests in civil wars by using the broader contexts of images and identity. Hence, it is crucial that the adversaries change their images of each other for a peaceful resolution to be successful.

³⁸ Susan L. Woodward, “Economic Priorities in successful Implementation,” in *Ending Civil War: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stedman, Stephen John, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens, (U.S.A. & U.K.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 185-187.

³⁹ Harold H Saunders, “A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts,” (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), Pref. xvii.

⁴⁰ Fr. Bert Layson, “Reflections on Public Participation in Peace Process in Mindanao,” <http://www.mindanaopeaceweavers.org> (accessed 28 Aug 05).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Janice Gross Stein, “Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict,” in *Turbulent Peace: the Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, eds. Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press. 2003), 189.

According to William Zartman, there are three elements that affect the dynamics of conflict and govern the possibilities of a successful resolution: “the insurgents’ needs and the phases of rebellion, the government’s agendas, and structural relations between the two sides. The dynamics of each element are independent of each other; each has to be in the right phase for conditions to be supportive of negotiations”.⁴³ Accordingly, “negotiations take place when both parties lose faith in their chances of winning and see an opportunity for cutting losses and achieving satisfaction through accommodation.”⁴⁴ In the case of the GRP and the MILF conflict, both adversaries have reached the hurting stalemate point where both realize the destructive effect of the conflict and start to look at opportunities in a peace process.⁴⁵

According to Donald Rothchild, in the implementation of the peace agreement, “a primary focus on security issues during the transition to a self enforcing peace is essential.”⁴⁶ He cited the need for those involved in the peace process to overcome collective fears of the future, such as insecurity and predatory behavior of the stronger party in the initial transition process. In this regard, parties in the conflict would like to know in detail what would be the security provisions of the peace accord in the transition process.⁴⁷ He also cited the crucial importance of the commitment of the third parties to provide the necessary force to effect what has been agreed upon in cases of insecurity and predatory behavior. In this regard, the security provision of the GRP-MILF peace agreement must incorporate the participation of third parties that are capable to establish and sustain a secured environment.

⁴³ William Zartman, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. (Washington DC: the Brookings Institution, 1995), 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁵ USIP Special Report 131, “The Mindanao Peace Talks :Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines,” <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr131.html#ripe> (accessed 29 Aug 05).

⁴⁶ Donald Rothchild, “Settlement Terms and Post Agreement Stability,” in *Ending Civil Wars: the Implementation of the Peace Agreements*, eds. Stephen John Stedman et al. (USA: Lynne Reiner Publication, 2002), 117.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

In search for the prospect for sustainable peace between GRP and MILF, this thesis paper argues that positive conditions of the three independent variables or a combination of these variables namely: (1) ripeness of conflict for resolution, (2) the progress on the peace process, and (3) participation of external actors will likely result to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

D. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This thesis is a case study of the MILF insurgency in the Philippines. It looks at the evolution of the conflict and its outcome, and finds out if the conflict is ripe for resolution. It then analyzes the conditions of the peace process to find if there are favorable or unfavorable conditions to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Lastly, it examines the participation of external countries and international institutions, especially of a third party facilitator, and a major super power to find out if there is significant external support to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

This study covers the origin and incidents that led to the Moros' armed struggle for secession, which includes the U.S. colonial occupation of the Philippines in the early 20th century to the present time. It is mostly focused on negotiating peace with the MILF, but because of its strong connection to the whole Moro insurgency, it also considers the MNLF organization. However, it does not touch on the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in Mindanao. Sources for this study include primary and secondary sources comprised of official documents, news reports, books, and scholarly literature. The analysis examined relevant documents and academic literature available from both the Philippines and international sources: a) official documents, military and police unclassified reports, laws, and statistics surveyed by the Philippine government and other credible institutions; b) international government and non-government organizations' reports, analysis and statistics; c) sources affiliated or linked to the MILF and other Moro organizations; d) academic literature on political violence, peace building, conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

1. Chapter II: Evolution of the MILF Conflict

This chapter examines the history of the conflict between the Government Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It discusses the trends, incidents, and phases in the development of the conflict that led to the emergence of the MILF. It analyzes the goals, strategies and structure of the MILF, and the extent of its influence over the Moro people, and some current concerns. Lastly, it examines if the conflict is ripe for resolution by looking at the cost of the conflict and the opportunities that promote a peaceful resolution, rather than continuing the conflict.

2. Chapter III: GRP-MILF Peace Process

This chapter analyzes the prospects for the political dialogue. It looks at the (1) the past peace approaches of the government, (2) the peace agreements achieved so far, (3) the effectiveness of ceasefire mechanisms on the ground, (4) the demands of the MILF, (5) the political stand of the GRP, (6) the participation of civil society groups, (7) the obstacles and prospects of the peace process, and (8) the impact of the current national political crisis to the peace process. This analysis mainly covers the period when the peace negotiations resumed in 2001 during the time of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo up to the present (2005).

3. Chapter IV: Participation of External Actors

This chapter analyzes the level of participation of foreign governments and international institutions in the peaceful settlement of the MILF conflict. It aims to find if there is considerable multinational involvement and if their support has a significant impact on the peaceful resolution of the conflict and in achieving sustainable peace. Substantial attention is focused on Malaysia and the U.S., who have shown the greater interest in the resolution of the conflict. Their direct contributions have been considered instrumental in aiding the GRP and MILF in bringing about a more stable security environment and advancing the level of the peace negotiations. It also looks at the involvement of Libya, the Organization of Islamic Conference, the United Nations, and the World Bank.

4. Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Chapter V is a summary of the MILF conflict, conclusions, and recommendations towards achieving sustainable peace. It consolidates the positive areas on which peace could be achieved and at the same time recognizes the problems. It tells of the prospect for sustainable peace between the GRP and MILF, and emphasizes the need for greater involvement by third parties in the peaceful settlement of the conflict, as well as in the implementation phase which is often seen as the critical period in the case of the Moro rebellion.

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II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT AND ITS OUTCOME

This chapter is an analysis of the Moro rebellion that aims to explain where the conflict mainly originated, how it evolved and what its outcome is. It deals with the grievance issues of the Moros and the opportunities that made possible the Moro armed struggle. It provides crucial information on mass migration of Christian settlers and land policies initiated by the state that explains why land and polity become central to the peace negotiations of today, and the incidents that fueled the rebellion in the past. It also examines the MNLF and the MILF rebel groups that have launched the serious armed struggle for secession with the aid of external actors, which are now supporting the peace process. It is believed that peace with the MILF will significantly bring peace in the whole of Mindanao. It argues that the conflict seems ripe for resolution based on the outcome of the recent major clashes between the GRP forces and the MILF in 2000, which made them return to the peace negotiation and commit to the realization that the only solution to the problem is through a negotiated political solution.

A. ORIGIN OF THE CONFLICT

The MILF insurgency is part of the more than three decade armed struggle for independence by the Moros which was originally spearheaded by the Moro National Liberation Front in 1971. The MILF broke away from the MNLF in 1977 due to ideological differences and factionalism.⁴⁸ It became the main rebel group, leading the struggle for independence in 1996, when the MNLF signed a final peace agreement with the Ramos government. The conflict originated from a combination of factors, but was largely due to the state's migration and land policies⁴⁹ that started in the early 1900s during the American colonial period and continued by the Philippine Republic upon its independence in 1946.

⁴⁸ David, 88.

⁴⁹ Eric Gutierrez and Saturnino Borras, Jr., "The Moro Conflict: Landlessness and Misdirected State Policies" (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2004), 6, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PS008.pdf#search='The%20Moro%20Conflict%3A%20Land%20and%20Misdirected%20policies'> (accessed 14 Aug 05).

After a fierce campaign of pacification in Mindanao in the early 20th century, the American colonial rule initiated migration of Filipino Catholics from Luzon and Visayas to Mindanao through various settlement programs, which are now being blamed as major causes of the conflict. These settlement programs were initiated in order to first, pacify political military tension between the colonial state and Filipino revolutionaries in Luzon; second, extend the scope of nation building; and third, develop the region economically by infusing state and private investments.⁵⁰ These settlement programs were continued by the Philippine government upon its independence in 1946, primarily because of the *hukbalahap*, an anti-Japanese force, which in the 1950s evolved as a peasant revolt after World War II due to problems of landlessness in Luzon. Members of the *hukbalahap* were offered amnesty, a house, and 25 acres of land, which eventually lured the rebels to return to the mainstream of society.⁵¹

The mass migration of poor people from the north and central parts of the country in Mindanao created resentment among the Moros due to the devastating social implications it caused in their areas. These migrations have greatly impacted the demography of the region, whereby at the last quarter of the 20th century, the Moros have become the minority in their own land. The 75% Moro population in the early 1900s was reduced to 25% by 1960, and less than 18% in 1990.⁵²

⁵⁰ Gutierrez and Borrás, 7.

⁵¹ Sar Desai, *South East Asia: Past & Present* (US: Westview press, 2003, 5th edition), 211 -212

⁵² Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Options in the Pursuit of Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in the southern Philippines" *Asian Survey*. Vol. 41, No.2. (Mar-Apr 2001), 274.

Table 1. Population Trends in the Muslim Areas: 1918-1970⁵³

Area	1918	1939	1948	1960	1970
<i>Muslims in total</i>					
<i>Philippine population</i>	4.29%	4.23%	4.11%	4.86%	4.32%
<i>Cotabato</i>					
Non-Muslims	61,052	135,939	284,507	672,659	711,430
Muslims	110,926	162,996	155,162	356,460	424,577
Ratio*	0.5504	0.8340	1.8336	1.8871	1.6756
<i>Lanao</i>					
Non-Muslims	8,140	80,805	106,703	236,670	308,328
Muslims	83,319	162,632	237,215	412,260	497,122
Ratio*	0.098	0.497	0.450	0.574	0.620
<i>Palawan</i>					
Non-Muslims	63,529	87,278	97,655	149,893	219,566
Muslims	5,524	6,395	8,614	12,776	17,069
Ratio*	11.501	13.648	11.337	11.732	12.863
<i>Sulu</i>					
Non-Muslims	4,147	16,584	1,393	15,972	23,633
Muslims	168,629	230,533	226,883	310,926	401,984
Ratio*	0.025	0.072	0.006	0.051	0.059
<i>Zamboanga</i>					
Non-Muslims	102,544	263,956	288,593	829,389	1,251,870
Muslims	44,789	92,028	133,348	194,444	191,527
Ratio*	2.289	2.868	2.164	4.265	6.536

*Number of non-Muslims for every Muslim.

Source: Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, 1975, using data from Bureau of Census and Statistics; see Gowing (1979: 252-56).

⁵³ Sourced from Gutierrez and Borrás, Jr., 14.

This settlement program of Catholics to Mindanao was supported with land homestead programs, which caused the Moros' landlessness. Before colonization, the Muslims owned most of the land but the interplay of state's policies on land disposition and migration policies slowly dispossessed the Moros of their land. The U.S. colonial administration implemented Land Registration Act no. 496 of 1902, which provided for the state's power to issue a parcel of land to a legitimate claimant and the Philippine commission Act No. 178 of 1903 put all unregistered land under the category of public domain. The Mining Law of 1905 gave the Americans the right to acquire public lands for mining purposes. These were followed by the Public Land Act of 1913, 1915, and 1925, which all provided for the availability of unoccupied, unreserved and unappropriated public lands to homesteaders and private corporations.⁵⁴

Filipino capitalists from the northern part of the country surged to Mindanao and established logging, pasture, and coconut concessions. American companies also came and established land based businesses. Firestone acquired 1,000 hectares for its rubber plantation in the Cotabato area in 1957. Dole came in 1963 and converted vast tracks of land into a pineapple plantation. Some obtained logging concessions, like the Weyerhouse Corporation which was granted 72,000 hectares of forest land in 1966, and the Boise-Cascade Corporation with 42,000 hectares.⁵⁵ As a consequence, the 98% landholdings of the Moros in the early 20th century were greatly reduced to only 17% by the 1980s and around 80% of the Moros became landless.⁵⁶ Only 30% of the land was left to the Moros in 1972 and by 1982, it had further declined to 17%.⁵⁷ The disadvantaged Moros, who were not used to the concept of land property rights, lost their lands through dubious legal means or outright confiscation.⁵⁸ Eventually, the Moros lost

⁵⁴ Erlinda Burton, "The Quest of the Indigenous Communities in Mindanao, Philippines: Rights to Ancestral Domain," (2003), 2,
[http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/AllSymbols/9E44622AD80E6C2AC1256D25004C0820/\\$File/G0314167.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/AllSymbols/9E44622AD80E6C2AC1256D25004C0820/$File/G0314167.pdf?OpenElement) (accessed 10 May 2005).

⁵⁵ Sonny Melencio, "Debates on the Right to Self-determination and the Moro Question in the Philippines," (2000), *Asia Europe Dialogue* (ASED),
http://www.ased.org/artman/publish/article_333.shtml (accessed 15 Nov 05).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tan, 271.

both the political and economic powers to the Christian migrants who are now the majority in Mindanao. Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, President of the influential Catholic Bishops Conference in the Philippines, characterizes these as consequences of government policies towards subjugating, assimilating, and integrating the Bangsamoro into the mainstream body politic.⁵⁹ Combined, these developments established a state of ethnic dominance in Mindanao, which according to Paul Collier, is a major cause for civil conflict in ethnically heterogeneous societies like the Philippines.⁶⁰ The impact of settlers on the demography of the region and the growing landlessness of the Muslims established the grievances that would be the mobilizing forces for a potentially explosive situation at the right time.

B.R. Rodil cited some of the following state's resettlement policies: ⁶¹

- The Interisland Migration Division of the Bureau of Labor was set up in the 1920s.
- The Quirino-Recto Colonization Act (Act 4197) was enacted in February 1935.
- The National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA) was created by Commonwealth Act 441 in 1939. The NLSA was abolished in 1950 after facilitating the settlement of 8,300 families; it was replaced by the short-lived Land Settlement Development Administration (LASEDECO), which was responsible for opening Tacurong, Isulan, and Bagumbayan (now part of Sultan Kudarat) as well as Buluan, Sultan sa Barongis, and Ampatuan (now part of Maguindanao).
- The Rice and Corn Production Administration, set up in 1949, was also involved in resettlement.

⁵⁹ Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples (ACPP) Backgrounder: "Working for Peace in Mindanao," (May 2004), 1-2, <http://www.acpp.org/uappeals/bgound/mindanao.html> (accessed 16 Sep 05).

⁶⁰ Collier, 155.

⁶¹ Sourced from Gutierrez and Borras, Jr., 7-8.

- The National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA), established in 1954, administered a total of nine resettlement areas in Mindanao and one in Palawan.
- Under the Quirino and Magsasay administrations in the early 1950s, the Economic Development Corps opened resettlement areas for surrendered or captured Huk insurgents, who were sent into the heart of Maguindanao and Maranao ancestral territories.
- The Land Reform Code passed under the Macapagal administration in 1963 included resettlement as part of the land reform program.
- The creation of the Department of Agrarian Reform in 1971 brought into existence a Bureau of Resettlement (Rodil 1994: 38–39).

Table 2. State Resettlement Policies

The infamous Jabidah massacre on 18 March 1968 on Corregidor Island, near Manila Bay in Luzon, topped the grievances. It served as the tipping point for the already huge resentment of the Moros against the government that was perceived as acting on behalf of the Christian majority. This unfortunate incident stemmed from President Ferdinand E. Marcos' plan to retake Sabah from Malaysia on behalf of the ownership claim by the sultan of Sulu. The secret plan was to infiltrate Sabah and instigate a rebellion among the *Tausogs* against the Malaysian government, whereupon the Philippine military would later intervene to protect the rebels.⁶² As part of this plan, the AFP recruited 200 Muslims in Mindanao, mostly *Tausog* and *Samal* young men from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, who underwent training in Corregidor. However, these recruits were involved in a mutiny, which resulted in the death of fourteen Muslim recruits and seventeen others missing.⁶³ The Moros' outrage was compounded by the fact that no one from the military was indicted.⁶⁴ The outcry of their sentiments is captured best by Buendia when he said,

⁶² Norodin Alonto Lucman, "Moro archives: A History of Armed Conflicts in Mindanao and East Asia" (Quezon City: FLC Press Inc., 2000), 155, cited from David, 61.

⁶³ David, 62.

⁶⁴ Buendia, 3.

The Jabitah mass execution inflamed Christians and Muslims alike and stoked up the extant revolutionary environment in late 1960s to early 1970s. Filipino Muslims have experienced the contradictions in their hyphenated identity and felt the frustrations in their bid to be integrated into the body politic. The massacre was perceived as state's assault against Muslims who offered their services to the Republic, but were duped, subjugated, and perfidiously murdered by Christians acting on behalf of the state.⁶⁵

The incident brought the Muslim resentment to its peak and led to the formation of the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) by former Cotabato governor, Datu Udtog Matalam, who vowed to establish an independent state in Mindanao, the Sulu and Palawan.⁶⁶ The independence movement gained support from Libya which even opened an Islamic directorate of the Philippines to coordinate its assistance to the Moros.⁶⁷ Similarly, Malaysia, feeling aggrieved by the plan of Marcos to retake Sabah, extended guerilla training support to the young members of the MIM in Sabah, starting in 1969.⁶⁸ Those who underwent training in Malaysia included Nur Misuari who eventually formed the MNLF upon return to Mindanao.

In central Mindanao, sectarian violence between Christian settlers and Muslims spread like wildfire in the early 1970s. Christian gangs attacked Muslims as Muslim gangs also attacked Christian farmers resulting in the deaths of 137 people in the span of two months. The sectarian attacks escalated further and proved devastating. From the period between January and October 1971, 305 Muslims and 269 Christians were killed and approximately 500 houses were burned.⁶⁹ This period also saw the rise of Christian Tiruray resistance in Cotabato led by Feliciano Luces, popularly known as *Kumander Toothpick*, who became known as a fanatical anti-Muslim, fighting armed Moro gangs and elites. The most gruesome evidence of the sectarian violence was the Manili incident

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Eliseo R Mercado, "Culture, Economics and Revolt in Mindanao: The Origins of the MNLF and the Politics of Moro Separatism," in *Armed Separatism in southeast Asia*, edited by Lim and Vani, op. cit., 168-175, cited from Tan, 272.

⁶⁷ Tan, 272.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (USA: University of California Press, 1998) cited from Buendia, 149.

wherein an armed Christian group in Cotabato known as *Ilaga* massacred sixty-five men, women and children at a mosque in June 1971.⁷⁰

B. RISE AND DECLINE OF THE MNLF

The Moro National Liberation Front emerged in 1969 and spearheaded the armed struggle for the secession of Mindanao, which saw the height of the fighting in the early 1970s, but was unsuccessful. It signed a peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1976, which was a failure, and another one in 1996, which is considered to be holding as of now, but is hardly seen as a success up to this time. The MNLF was formed when Datu Udtog Matalam, founder of the MIM, abandoned his call for independence after he was offered the position of Presidential Adviser on Muslim Affairs in October 1968, representing the four million Muslims of the country.⁷¹ In effect, the MIM was dissolved but this did not put aside the strong sentiment for secession among the young Filipino-Muslim members of the MIM. Nur Misuari, who was then a charismatic university professor, was quick to mobilize this sentiment and the Muslims' resentment against the Christian migrants in Mindanao. He successfully formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1971. The MNLF immediately gained international recognition from the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM), the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), and was particularly supported by Libya and Malaysia.⁷²

Following this, the period from 1972 to 1976 saw the fierce battles between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MNLF, resulting in the deaths of approximately 100,000 people and more than 500,000 displaced refugees.⁷³ At the height of its counter insurgency campaign from 1972 to 1976, the military deployed 50 battalions for the battles to retake Jolo and Cotabato.⁷⁴ The cost of human lives and destruction of property prompted the Marcos government to negotiate a peaceful

⁷⁰ Mckenna., 151.

⁷¹ Thomas M. Mckenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (USA: University of California Press, 1998), cited from Buendia, 3.

⁷² Ronald J. May, "The Religious Factor in Three Minority Movements" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 13(4) (March 1992), 398, cited from Tan, 272.

⁷³ Rivera, "Armed Challenges to the Philippines Government" cited from Tan, 272.

⁷⁴ David, 81.

settlement through mediation by the OIC and Libya. This led to the 1976 Tripoli agreement that provided for the merger of thirteen provinces that were then clustered as part of regions nine and ten, into one autonomous Bangsamoro regional government.⁷⁵

However, the peace agreement did not provide a viable solution to the conflict. Differences on how the autonomous government should be created became a major obstacle to peace. On the one hand, Marcos argued that the creation of the autonomous government should be in accordance with the constitutional process, that is, by involving the people in the affected areas through the conduct of a referendum. On the other hand, Misuari opposed Marcos' call for a referendum and insisted on the immediate declaration of a unitary autonomous government.⁷⁶ He realized that the Moros did not have the numbers to win in a referendum because Christians were already the majority at that time. True enough, the result of the referendum on 17 April 1977 overwhelmingly rejected the MNLF's aspiration for one autonomous region to which the thirteen provinces should belong.⁷⁷ It also rejected some aspects of the autonomy, such as adapting the name *Bangsamoro Islamic Region*, flying a separate flag, Sharia courts, and allowing the MNLF to be the regional security forces.⁷⁸ Based on these results, there was no way the Moros would be able to exercise political power over the numerically, economically, and politically superior Christian settlers.⁷⁹ Misuari felt cheated and accused the government of violating the provisions of the 1976 Tripoli agreement. The situation further deteriorated when both sides started to accuse each other of ceasefire violations. In the 8th Islamic Countries' Foreign Ministers Meeting (ICFM), Misuari tried to pressure Marcos by asking the OIC to impose economic sanctions on the Philippines, but failed.

⁷⁵ Tan, 272.

⁷⁶ David, 86.

⁷⁷ David, 87.

⁷⁸ Eric S Casino, "Mindanao Statecraft and Ecology: Moros, Lumads, and Settlers Across the Lowland-Highland Continuum" (Cotabato City: Notre Dame University, 2000), 240, cited from David Jr., 87.

⁷⁹ David, 87.

The outcome of the peace agreement was a failure. However, the conflict in the period from 1976 to 1996 did not have the same intensity as in the early 1970's. This can be attributed to the reduction of external support and internal developments that weakened the MNLF. Marcos' diplomacy with Libya and the OIC largely reduced the support of the MNLF. This was coupled with the defeat of Tun Mustapha, a major external supporter of the MNLF in the state of Sabah. Internally, the MNLF also suffered from the defection of many of its leaders to the government and the break away of Hashim Salamat's group in 1977.⁸⁰ Thus, the MNLF armed struggle significantly waned and Mindanao was relatively more peaceful than during the early 1970s. However, the conflict remained open ended with the GRP and MNLF waiting for the right time to start anew on the negotiations for settlement of the conflict.

Twenty years later, the MNLF forged a final peace agreement with the GRP under the term of President Fidel V. Ramos in 1996. He pursued peace negotiations with various rebel groups, placing special importance on ending the Moro insurgency in the south. Ramos' peace efforts were supported by Indonesian President Suharto and the OIC. Indonesia played a mediating role in the peace process, while the OIC continuously influenced the MNLF to settle the conflict with the Philippine government. Hence, the MNLF had no choice but to settle for autonomy.⁸¹

The peace agreement provided for the creation of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), which was responsible for the implementation and supervision of peace and development programs in Mindanao's Special Zones for Peace and Development (SZOPAD). SZOPAD covered fourteen provinces and nine cities in Mindanao, including Palawan.⁸² Under the agreement, the existing Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM-this was created during the presidency of Corazon Aquino, Ramos' predecessor) was to be re-engineered into a wider autonomous regional government subject to referendum in the affected areas.

⁸⁰ David, 84 – 88.

⁸¹ David, 97.

⁸² Ibid., 97-98.

Nine days after the peace agreement, Nur Misuari ran unopposed for the position of governor in the existing ARMM. The government backing made him the most influential leader in Mindanao as he was Chairman of the SPCPD and Governor of the ARMM at the same time. Other MNLF commanders also assumed positions in government, such as in the local municipalities, provincial government, regional assembly and in the bureaucracies of SPCPD and ARMM. In addition, some 5,200 MNLF members were integrated in the AFP and 1,250 in the Philippine National Police (PNP).⁸³ The MILF distanced itself from GRP-MNLF peace negotiations despite invitations from the government because of its consistent preference to independence rather than mere autonomy.

The relationship soured between the GRP and Misuari five years after the peace agreement, during President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's term. People from within and outside the MNLF organization accused Misuari of incompetence and corruption. For a period of five years under his leadership since 1996, some PhP 43 billion was allocated by the national government for the region's development programs, but this yielded no major improvement.⁸⁴ This was further complicated by Misuari's opposition to the conduct of a referendum in August 2001 for the expansion of the ARMM, as outlined in the 1996 peace agreement. A new ARMM was to replace the old one and the SPCPD, in which Misuari was serving as governor and chairman respectively. This was to be followed by an election scheduled on 26 November 2001 for the new ARMM officials, which posed as a threat to Misuari's political positions at the time. His woes continued when the MNLF's "Council of Fifteen" seized control of the MNLF and stripped him of his powers as chairman of the MNLF by reducing his position to *chairman emeritus*. The council of fifteen was later given recognition by the Philippine government and the OIC as the ruling body of the MNLF.⁸⁵ Thus, feeling betrayed and fearful of losing his powers, Misuari instigated his loyal followers from his native place of Sulu to attack several military posts in the area on 19 November 2001. The attack left around 100

⁸³ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁴ David, 108.

⁸⁵ Buendia, 5.

people dead that were mostly his followers.⁸⁶ When Misuari fled to Malaysia, he was detained by Malaysian authorities and was subsequently turned over to the Philippine government. He is currently in confinement awaiting trial for sedition and corruption.⁸⁷

C. THE MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT

Fractionalization in the MNLF central committee along ethno-religious lines and the ideological differences between Misuari and Salamat led to the emergence of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).⁸⁸ In 1977, Salamat Hashim led a break-away group composed mainly of fighters from central Mindanao. They were mostly Maguindanaoans, Maranaos and Iranuns.⁸⁹ Different from Nur Misuari, Salamat was a religious scholar who studied at Al Ahzar University in Egypt. His personality was more moderate and reconciliatory at the beginning of his leadership.⁹⁰ He died on 13 July 03 in a remote area in the southern Philippines due to a natural sickness.⁹¹

1. Goals

The goal of the MILF is to establish a sovereign Islamic state which shall be governed by Shariah law in areas of Mindanao where the Moros are the majority.⁹² This goal indicates two political aspirations of the rebel group: firstly, independence from the Philippine republic by separating a portion of the country's territory, and secondly establishing a polity that is religious in character.

At the outset of its separation from the MNLF in 1977, the MILF enjoyed the support of key Moro personalities, such as former Senator Salipada Pendatun, ex-Representative Rashid Lucman,⁹³ and several Muslim religious leaders.⁹⁴ Misuari was

⁸⁶ David, 107.

⁸⁷ Buendia, 5-6.

⁸⁸ David, 88.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ David, 88.

⁹¹ ICG Asia Report, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process, (July 2004), 9, 13, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=286341=1> (accessed 15 Aug 05).

⁹² Chalk, 247.

⁹³ David, 88.

⁹⁴ Willem Wolters, "Muslim Rebel Movements in the southern Philippines: Recruitment Area for Al Qaeda Terrorist?", *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology*, no. 40, (2002), 149-162, 157.

successful in the late 1960s to propagate and capitalize on the un-subjugated identity of the Moros in mobilizing the Filipino Muslims against the Philippine republic.⁹⁵ Salamat Hashim, on the other hand, used Islam as the rallying point for the Moros, which proved to be a powerful means of mobilizing support for the armed struggle because of the Moros' religious character.

It should be noted that, in the 1980s, there was a resurgence of religious and cultural Islamic practice, as a consequence of the Muslims' program to revive Islam worldwide. Religious scholars and funds flowed from Middle East countries and Malaysia for the revival of Islam, reflected in the number of mosques mushrooming from mere hundreds in the 1970s to 1,500 by 1983. Also, there were more than 3,000 religious preachers and more Madrasah schools being established, numbering 2,000 in 1998.⁹⁶

2. Strategies

Since its formation in 1980, the MILF showed a more moderate and conciliatory stance than the MNLF. Seemingly, it was their strategy to avoid major clashes with government troops so that its forces could be built up. By the late 1990s, the group was able to reach an estimated strength of 8,000 to 11,000 men, organized into six (6) divisions of the Bangsamoro Islamic Army (BIAF).⁹⁷ The MILF maintains its mass base support from central Mindanao's 1.6 million Maguindanaoans and 1.9 million Maranaos from Lanao del Sur, and Iranuns from north Cotabato and Basilan.⁹⁸ This large base demonstrates the wide influence of the MILF among the Moro people.⁹⁹ The MILF has effective control of large areas of central Mindanao from which it draws an 80 member Consultative Assembly that has popular Moro support.¹⁰⁰ The bulk of MILF forces are in the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and North Cotabato

⁹⁵ Wolters, 156.

⁹⁶ Wolter's, 157.

⁹⁷ Chalk, 248.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 248.

⁹⁹ Tan, 273.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

where the Maranaos and Maguindanaoans are majority.¹⁰¹ Apparently, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces remain under the influence of the MNLF. This explains why the fighting in the year 2000 between the government forces and the MILF only took place in the central Mindanao areas and not in the three aforementioned provinces controlled by the MNLF.

Aside from establishing a local support base, the MILF maintains contact with external supporters, particularly from members of the worldwide *ummah* community. In the past, training, equipment and funding of the MILF were provided by a host of supporters mainly from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Malaysia.¹⁰² The OIC and Libya, however, do not openly support the MILF because of its continuing recognition of the MNLF as the representative of the Moros.¹⁰³ By reason of geographic proximity and the tacit support of Malaysia, Sabah served as a vital training ground for the MILF leaders wherein ex-British Special Forces even took part in conducting the training.¹⁰⁴

3. MILF Structure and Capabilities

The MILF organization has evolved from a simple break-away armed group in 1977 to the politico-military organization that it is today. The MILF has an executive council that determines policies and their implementation, chaired by Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. It also has its supreme Islamic court as its judiciary branch that handles criminal and civil cases in accordance with shariah law. Its legislative branch is called Majilis al-Shura. The MILF's military wing is the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Force (BIAF), which used to be organized into six territorial divisions, and is now organized into nine base commands with more or less six brigades each and a separate special operations group.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Janes on line publication, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front," 8, http://www4.janes.com/K2/doc.jsp?K2DocKey=%2Fcontent1%2Fjanesdata%2Fbinder%2Fjwit%2Fjwit0277.htm@current.htmProd_Name=JWIT.htm@current&Prod_Name=JWIT&@current&Prod_Name=JWIT & (accessed 27 Sept 05).

¹⁰² David, 90.

¹⁰³ David, 90.

¹⁰⁴ Tan, 273.

¹⁰⁵ Janes publication, 3.

In 1996, the MILF gained more members after the signing of the peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF with membership reaching as high as 15,000,¹⁰⁶ and since then became the primary vanguard of the Moros' struggle for independence. "A Philippine military intelligence estimate in January 2005 puts the MILF strength from 11,000 to 12,000 people, with 9,000 firearms, more or less; however, western intelligence puts it at 15,000 people with 11,000 firearms, more or less."¹⁰⁷ Although the MILF is not at par with the Armed Forces of the Philippines in terms of military equipment, it has a huge arsenal of weapons that, aside from the normal AK47, M16, and M14 rifles, includes Russian made RPG-2 rocket propelled grenade launchers, mortars, machine-guns and allegedly a US-made Stinger anti-aircraft missile.¹⁰⁸

4. Present Challenges to the MILF Leadership

The major offensives launched against the MILF in the year 2000, the death of Hashim Salamat, and the presence of the terrorist groups in Mindanao threaten the cohesiveness of the MILF organization and its public image. Currently, it is facing three challenges of weak command and control, factionalism, and its reported ties with the terrorist groups.

5. Weak Command and Control

The aftermath of the AFP major offensives in the year 2000 caused the six big MILF territorial divisions to disperse into smaller formations in order to avoid easy detection and to have more flexibility to conduct hit and run tactics against the military forces. However, the MILF's shift to guerilla tactics caused the transformation of six MILF territorial divisions into nine mobile base commands.¹⁰⁹ An outcome of this is that the field commanders enjoyed much autonomy in coping with situations on the ground. The top leadership has loosened its firm grip over those rebels in the field. Definitely, there is less MILF control of its field units now than before the AFP offensive in 2000.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Chalk, 248.

¹⁰⁷ Janes publication, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Chalk, 273.

¹⁰⁹ ICG Report, 10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

6. Factionalism in the MILF

The death of Hashim Salamat on 13 July 05 exposed the latent tension between two main ethno-linguistic groups within the organization. MILF Maguindanaoans objected to the appointment made by the dying leader for Alim Abdulaziz Mimbantas to become the next leader of the MILF.¹¹¹ Mimbantas, who was also a graduate of Al Azhar University in Egypt, was the vice chairman for internal affairs under which he led the internal security force, the local intelligence network, and the internal brigade.¹¹²

The objection of the Maguindanaons also stemmed from the fact that Mimbantas is a Maranao and that he does not have the propensity of force that the Maguindanaon Al Haj Murad has. While Murad is supported by more than 5,000 armed followers, Mimbantas has only a few hundred followers. This issue of succession took the MILF more than three weeks to settle before it was able to officially announce the death of Hashim Salamat.¹¹³ Evidence of factionalism is seen in limiting the powers of Mimbantas, Murad's main rival to the chairmanship position of the MILF, and in appointing officials to key positions of the organization based on ethnic bias. The position given to Mimbantas as vice chairman for military affairs was not concurrent as the chief of staff of the BIAF, which used to be held at the same time by Al Haj Murad in the past.¹¹⁴ Instead, a fellow Maguindanaoan was given the position as chief of staff of the BIAF in the person of Sammy Al Mansour, a trusted aide of Murad.¹¹⁵

This gives a glimpse of the ethnic friction between *Maguindanaoans* and *Maranaos* who largely comprise the MILF rank and file. Although a power struggle may have been settled now that Mimbantas voluntarily gave way for Murad to assume the MILF leadership,¹¹⁶ it is something that may likely explode in the future, owing to the

¹¹¹ Ibid, 9.

¹¹² In a culture where kinship plays a strong bond, Salamat's closeness to Mimbantas is explained by the fact that Mimbantas is the father of Salamat's first wife, ICG Report, 9.

¹¹³ ICG Report, 9.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁶ "GMA does not listen to peace advisers", *Philippine Daily Inquirer on line*, 14 December 2003, 1, 21, cited from ICG Report, 9.

differences and brewing competition between the two ethnic groups, if not carefully harmonized. This problem of ethno-linguistic division is not new among the Moro rebel groups. In fact, the MILF broke away from the MNLF in 1977, not only due to differences of ideology, but also because of differences among the top leadership along ethno-linguistic lines.¹¹⁷ Thus, at this early stage, the MILF organization must be very keen to maintain the political harmony of the two main ethnic tribes that provide the backbone of the organization.

7. MILF's Link with Terrorist Groups

The most serious challenge to the MILF leadership is the reported link of the rebels with terrorist groups, particularly with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), that existed during the time of the late Salamat Hashim as chairman of the MILF. Allegedly, training is being continued at the lower levels of the organization. Accordingly, a JI training camp named Camp *Hudaibiyah* was established within Camp Abubakar As Siddiq, a MILF main camp, in 1994.¹¹⁸ That same year, the first batch of trainees trained for two months and consisted of 60 MILF recruits and the next batch followed in 1995. Known JI terrorists that have been involved in Rizal day bombings in Manila, Davao airport, and Bali and Jakarta (GRP embassy) in Indonesia had reportedly been in the place between 1996 and 1999, either as instructors or students.¹¹⁹

Fathur Rohman Al Khozi, a confessed Rizal day bomber in Manila, was assisted by an MILF member named Mukhlis Yunus when he carried out the Rizal day bombing in Manila in December 2000. Mukhlis was the company commander of the BIAF special operations group detailed with the 3rd Field division under Alim Solaiman Pangalian, and was believed to be carrying the call for Jihad of Hashim Salamat in view of the fall of Camp Abubakar in July 2000.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Nur Misuari's domineering attitude of the MNLF was complicated by his being a *Tausog* from the small island of Sulu while Hashim Salamat was from central Mindanao, who enjoyed both support from the large population of Maguindanaoans and Maranaos, David, 88.

¹¹⁸ ICG Report, 15.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 13-17.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

In February, 2003, Salamat called again for all Moros to rise and fight for Jihad in retaliation to the AFPs Buliok offensive. As a result, several bombings occurred in Kabacan, Cotabato airport, Koronadal, Davao city airport, Tagum and Tacurong.¹²¹ These bombings were mostly executed by another graduate of Camp Hudaibiyah named Zulkifli who was assisted by his cohorts and local MILF as confessed by Abdulbasit Usman, an MILF platoon commander at the time.¹²² These bombings clearly show the terrorist's support for the MILF, if not the direct connection. On 20 June 2003, in view of the peace talks and the mounting pressure from both the US and Philippine government, Salamat Hashim issued a statement renouncing terrorism.¹²³ Officially, the MILF distanced itself from the terrorist group. However, it is uncertain if Salamat's pronouncement is being observed by the local commanders on ground that used to have connections with the JI operatives since 1994.

Today, the MILF leadership has renounced time and time again its reported ties with terrorist groups and insisted that the MILF is a legitimate armed struggle for independence. MILF chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim said in May 2005, "The MILF is very much opposed to any form of terrorism and this is incompatible with the MILF vision for the economic, cultural, and political advancement of the Bangsamoro people."¹²⁴

D. A CONFLICT RIPE FOR RESOLUTION?

After more than three decades of armed violence that saw its peak in the year 2000, the conflict seems ripe for resolution. A mutually hurting stalemate condition between the Philippine government and the MILF lends ripeness to the conflict as well as the emergence of opportunities and necessities. Zartman explains that a *mutually hurting stalemate* refers to a condition wherein the adversaries of the conflict have perceived that there is no longer any unilateral advantage to be gained in continuing the fighting, and

¹²¹ ICG Report, 7.

¹²² Ibid., 19-24.

¹²³ Carolyn O Arguillas, "Salamat issues policy statement rejecting terror; Ermita welcomes move" *Mindanews*, 22 June 2003, cited from ICG, 25.

¹²⁴ Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, "Peace is Partly at Hand" *Mindanews*, 05 June 2005, <http://www.mindanews.com/2005/06/05vws-murad-milf.html> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

instead see more costs in staying in the fight. In such situations, a peaceful settlement of the conflict becomes attractive as a way to avoid a potential catastrophe.¹²⁵

The government and the MILF have been badly hurt by decades of fighting which has already resulted in huge amount of both direct and indirect costs. Experts estimate the cost of the three decade conflict in Mindanao at roughly \$2 - \$3 billion dollars with 120,000 deaths and millions of migrants. It also contributed to the alarming widespread poverty of the populace in the ARMM which accounts for 56 % in 1991, 62.5% in 1997, and 71.3 % in the year 2000.¹²⁶ The Moro provinces ranked poorly among 78 provinces of the country. This only shows the negative effects of the conflict in the economy. Definitely, there is no actual winner in the 2000 peak of the fighting. Both sides prefer the peace process now than to continue the fighting because they are hurt by its huge cost. In the four months of fighting in the year 2000, the Philippine government spent around U.S. \$ 20 million and suffered 200 casualties.¹²⁷ For its part, the MILF lost several hundreds of its fighters, destruction of 50 of its camps including the biggest ones: camp Abu Bakar and camp Bushra, and the dispersal of its semi-conventional force into smaller units.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments" in *the global review of ethno politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, (September 2001), 8-18, http://www.ethnopolitics.org/archive/volume_1/issue_1/zartman.pdf (accessed 21 Oct 05).

¹²⁶ Schiavo-Campo, Slavatore & Mary Judd. "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Roots, Costs, and Potential Peace Dividend," *the World Bank*, paper no. 24 (February 2005), 5.

¹²⁷ David, 103.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Table 3. Comparison of Human Development Index Ranking and Real Per Capital Income in the SZOPAD Areas: 1997¹²⁹

Area	HDI Rank	Per Capita Income (pesos)	Per Capita Income (rank)
<i>Philippines (national)</i>	n.a.	21,877	n.a.
<i>National capital</i>	n.a.	48,930	n.a.
<i>Christian-dominated provinces where Muslims are found</i>			
Palawan	43	15,561	30
South Cotabato	47	15,187	35
Sultan Kudarat	49	13,852	44
Davao del Norte	52	12,450	57
Zamboanga del Sur	55	13,038	51
Davao del Sur	57	12,974	52
North Cotabato	59	12,312	61
Zamboanga del Norte	63	13,266	50
Davao Oriental	65	10,764	71
Sarangani	67	11,220	66
Lanao del Norte	71	9,637	76
<i>Provinces with highest concentration of Muslims</i>			
Basilan	73	14,053	41
Tawi-Tawi	74	18,409	15
Lanao del Sur	75	9,497	77
Maguindanao	76	10,841	70
Sulu	77	8,181	78

¹²⁹ Sourced from Gutierrez and Borras, Jr., 20.

Table 4. Worst-Performing Provinces Based on HDI Rank and Other Indices: 1997¹³⁰

Rank	HDI	Health Index	Education Index	Income Index
71	Lanao del Norte	Agusan del Sur	Sarangani	Agusan del Norte
72	Ifugao	Samar (Western)	Lanao del Sur	Masbate
73	Basilan	Ifugao	Maguindanao	Samar (Eastern)
74	Tawi-Tawi	Lanao del Sur	Ifugao	Siquijor
75	Lanao del Sur	Maguindanao	Tawi-Tawi	Lanao del Norte
76	Maguindanao	Sulu	Basilan	Lanao del Sur
77	Sulu	Tawi-Tawi	Sulu	Sulu

Source: National Statistical Coordination Board.

Learning from the outcome of the armed violence in 2000, the GRP and MILF are unlikely to embark in a protracted war anew. On the side of the MILF, the fighting is too costly because the rebels' communities have become the battlegrounds and this creates far reaching traumatic effects on their families. Proof of the MILF's seriousness to the peaceful option rather than continuing the fight is by its insistence to involve the international community in the peace process. In doing so, it puts forward its commitment to resolve the conflict peacefully in the eyes of the international community. Furthermore, the MILF's priority on the issue of security and rehabilitation of the Moro affected communities as the two main agenda in the peace negotiation shows its concern for the communities rather than continuing the fight. It only means, that the MILF is hurt when the Moro communities are affected by the fighting. Moreover, the MILF severed its ties with the JI terrorists in mid 2003 in view of the U.S. and the GRP's demand for the MILF to renounce terrorism. Definitely, the MILF does not want to continue the fight and become an object of the war on terror. For its part, the GRP has always insulated the MILF from the war on terror, especially in the height of bombings in 2003. It prevailed upon the U.S. not to include the MILF in the list of foreign terrorists organization, and

¹³⁰ Sourced from Gutierrez and Borrás, Jr., 21.

instead merely stepped up the pressure towards the MILF to renounce terrorism.¹³¹ This only shows of the GRP's strong commitment to pursue the peace track with the MILF than continuing the fight. The Philippine government could have sent the military again to attack the MILF positions and maximize aid from the U.S. war on terror had it opted to declare the MILF as a terrorist organization. By declaring the MILF as a terrorist group, the GRP will lose its chance to settle the conflict peacefully. It will find its place locked in armed hostilities once again, which is something the GRP would not want to happen because continuing the fight will only escalate the hostilities and may force the MILF to strengthen ties with extremists groups.¹³² Furthermore, the presence of a looming catastrophe, according to Zartman, enhances the ripeness of the conflict argument since the Philippine government and the MILF would not allow it to happen because the people in the communities would definitely suffer in large scale violence. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in the 1970s, which claimed several hundreds of lives and destroyed several hundreds of houses in just a period of one year may likely re-occur and escalate into an ethno-religious catastrophe. In fact, during the resumption of violence in May 2003, a majority Christian municipality in Zamboanga del Norte, Siocon town, was attacked by the Moro rebels killing at least 20 Christian soldiers and civilians, and held a dozen more hostages, as the rebels fled.¹³³ Attacks on Christians by the Moro rebels tend to re-ignite the age old animosities between them. In Carmen, Cotabato, several mixed communities started to seek protection among ethno-religious groups. Moros from majority Christian communities moved to villages that are dominated by their fellow Muslims just like in the cases of Malapag, Aroman, Manarapan, and Kitulaan villages, while Christians from Kitulaan moved to Christian dominated areas of Aroman and Carmen town.¹³⁴ These incidents are

¹³¹ ICG Asia Report, 7.

¹³² Ibid., 3.

¹³³ "MILF attack in Siocon won't go 'unpunished': Reyes," *Philippine daily Inquirer*, http://www.inq7.net/brk/2003/may/05/brkpol_10-1.htm (accessed 24 Nov 05).

¹³⁴ "Social Assessment of Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao," *World Bank, Environment and Social development Unit, East Asia and Pacific region*, 18-19, [http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/Socialassessmentconflict-AffectedAreasinMindanao/\\$FILE/Mindanao.pdf](http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/Socialassessmentconflict-AffectedAreasinMindanao/$FILE/Mindanao.pdf) (accessed 24 Nov 05).

closely associated with the conflict that tends to surface every time there is renewed fighting between the government forces and the rebels. Thus, if the conflict continues in the future there is a high probability that sectarian violence may resurface and deteriorate into a catastrophic magnitude.

In addition, ripeness of the conflict is enhanced by conditions of necessity and opportunity that are currently relevant. The Philippine government recognizes the fact that the conflict has been a major stumbling block to developing the country's economy, and the only way out is through peaceful settlement of the conflict. Likewise, it is a necessity to end the conflict in view of the government's fight against terror, knowing the fact that a peaceful settlement of the conflict will have a negative impact on Islamic militancy in the region. Furthermore, there are also certain opportunities that add ripeness to the conflict: the death of Salamat Hashim provides the new leadership with more flexibility in seeking out fresh solutions; the MILF's willingness to discuss its interests ahead of the political arrangement provides for a wider range of options rather than limiting the talks to the "independence or autonomy" proposition that hindered peace talks in the past, since the MILF has shown cooperation in a more interest based and problem solving negotiations. Lastly, the conflict has attracted international attention and participation that enhances its prospects for resolution.¹³⁵

E. CONCLUSION

There is a good prospect for achieving sustainable peace with the MILF because the conflict seems to be ripe for resolution and there are existing opportunities that favor its peaceful resolution. The outcome of the three decade conflict between the GRP and the MILF has seemingly reached the condition of a mutually hurting stalemate wherein both sides see the futility of continuing the conflict due to loss of life, property, and economic impact.¹³⁶ This is evidenced by the fact that both sides have re-affirmed in the 2001 Tripoli agreement that the only solution to the conflict is a negotiated political

¹³⁵ USIP Special Report, "The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines." (January 2005), 7, usip.org/specialreport/sr131.pdf#search=options (accessed 06 Sept 05).

¹³⁶ William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments" in the *global review of ethno politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, (September 2001), 8-18, http://www.ethnopolitics.org/archive/volume_1/issue_1/zartman.pdf (accessed 21 Oct 05).

settlement, and by their decision to allow the participation of the international community in finding a solution to the conflict. This is a realization that they cannot achieve victory over the other and that the best way is to resolve the conflict through the peace negotiations. Furthermore, both sides are sensitive to the welfare of the people in the affected areas as shown by their intention to prioritize the agenda of security and rehabilitation. The military may have the advantage of training, weapons and equipment, but it is not at all invincible to guerilla attacks by the rebels. On the side of the MILF, continuing the armed struggle is no longer favorable because it would result in more deaths and destruction on their side, especially since their communities have always been the battle grounds.

In the year 2000, the MILF was also been badly weakened by the outcome of the major offensive by the military. This made the rebels realize that they cannot win over the superior strength of the military and the only option left for them is peaceful negotiation. The MILF rebels are also forced to stay in the peace negotiation and cut their ties completely from the terrorists JI and Abu Sayyaf by the U.S. and Philippines war on terror. The death of Hashim Salamat also opened possibilities for the new leader, Murad Ebrahim, to explore other solutions. Murad is not a religious leader, so he may entertain more flexibility, unlike Salamat who had been restrictively consistent for establishing an independent Islamic state. The more than three decade old conflict has deeply submerged the areas of the Moros into widespread poverty. This condition provides an opportunity to attract the rebels into the peaceful resolution of the conflict by offering substantial peace and development programs because this would increase the incentive for peace.

The unfair state's migration and land policies in the past have mainly caused the political and economic marginalization of the Moros that, in effect, engendered a perception of exploitation and prejudice among them. Along this line, the land issue remains a critical point in resolving the conflict. Regaining significant control of land resources in Mindanao will reduce significantly the Moros' perception of past injustices. Having included for the first time the ancestral domain issue as one of the major agenda in the ongoing peace process gives a bright prospect to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The old animosity between Christians and the Moros seems to have been revived by the fighting in 2000 and 2003, as people in the affected areas divide among ethno-religious groups for protection. This condition shows a potentially dangerous situation because people start to identify the other ethnic group as hostile to their group, and vice versa. It can become similar to the incidents of early 1970s when sectarian violence erupted between Christians and Muslims. However, it also shows that such condition only happen every time the fighting between the military and the rebels would occur, and drag people in the communities to take sides. Hence, the level of mistrust between the two ethnic groups is largely connected to the armed violence that happens in their communities apart from the historical prejudices.

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III. GRP-MILF PEACE PROCESS

The prospects for sustainable peace between the GRP and the MILF largely depend on the success of the peace process and the surrounding political environment that may or may not be helpful to the whole peace effort. This chapter analyzes the prospect of the political dialogue. It looks at the: (a) past peace approaches of the government, (b) the peace agreements achieved so far, (c) the effectiveness of ceasefire mechanisms on the ground, (d) the demands of the MILF, (e) the political stand of the GRP, (f) the participation of civil society groups, (g) the impact of the current national political crisis to the peace process, and (h) the obstacles and prospects of the peace process. It is encouraging that the ceasefire is holding and the peace process has successfully hurdled the first two substantive agenda of security and rehabilitation, and there was a recent breakthrough on the last agenda of ancestral domain, which would then lead the peace process in negotiating for the political solution of the conflict. The political condition in the country has also opened a window of opportunity to accommodate a Bangsamoro state due to the current move to shift the country into a parliamentary federal republic. Based on this development, the MILF will have the chance to exercise a wider political and economic power in the new polity.

A. PAST PEACE APPROACHES WITH THE MILF

Several attempts for peace were made in the past by previous administrations of the Philippine government, but none has reached a peaceful settlement with the MILF. Military campaigns only resulted in more violence and destruction, trapping the innocent civilians in this seemingly endless conflict. President Ramos initiated peace negotiations in 1997 which bore some headway but fell short to consolidate his gains due to his retirement in 1998. President Estrada used a coercive approach and declared a total war with the rebel group in 2000, but failed to end the conflict. President Arroyo, the incumbent, opted for the peace negotiations to solve the conflict, which has been going on since 2001, and is now the object of this study.

The Philippine government never had formal peace negotiations with the MILF in the past because it was cautious not to give the MILF a belligerent status. It is also due to

the fact that the Philippine government and the OIC have considered the MNLF as the recognized representative of the Moro people. Hence, Philippine approaches to peace were always directed at dealing with the MNLF. It was only during the term of President Ramos that serious peace efforts with the MILF were first initiated.¹³⁷ Following the peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996, the Ramos government initiated talks with the MILF leadership about conducting peace negotiations. Exploratory talks from October 1996 to January 1997 resulted in the formation of a GRP-MILF technical committee which was divided into two parts: one for cessation of hostilities and the other for the peace talks and agenda setting. This was followed by the presentation of the MILF's talking points and nine point agenda in February 1997.¹³⁸ The major breakthrough of the Ramos initiative was the "Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities" (AGCH) in 1997.¹³⁹ The AGCH also provided for establishing GRP-MILF Coordinating Committees for the cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), having six members each.¹⁴⁰ Although there were occasional but small firefights between the military and the MILF rebels in the peripheries at that time, the governments' peace initiative pushed on and the ceasefire agreement was upheld.

Under the Estrada administration (1998-2001), the government sought to advance the level of the peace negotiations by tackling the substantive agenda issues. However, it is during his term that the peace efforts would make a one hundred eighty degree turn to a totally warlike approach that would later result in large number of casualties on both sides, massive destruction of property, and a huge number of refugees.

In August 1998 under the Estrada administration, the negotiation with the MILF continued and both panels arrived at the General Framework of Agreement of Intent (GFAI) with the MILF. Serious in its efforts, the GRP has acknowledged seven major camps of the MILF by October 1999 and was verifying 39 other camps which were then

¹³⁷ Santos, Jr., 5-6.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

¹³⁹ Buendia, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Santos, Jr., 4.

scheduled to be completed by the end of December of the same year.¹⁴¹ However, the acknowledgement of each camp as MILF's territory set an incentive to expand further its areas of control. For the MILF, establishing control of certain municipalities, then asking for GRP's recognition of these areas as its territories, will mean more territories. This modus operandi later led to the escalation of the hostilities. In the year 2000, the military eventually clashed with the MILF rebels when they forcibly occupied Kauswagan town hall in Lanao del Norte on 16 March 2000. This led to the breakdown of the ceasefire and the escalation of violence.¹⁴² The military forcibly undertook actions to retake the town hall, and eventually conducted major offensives against the MILF's several encampments. The heavy fighting caused great loss in human lives and property on both sides, with civilians caught in the crossfire.¹⁴³

Between 1996 and early 2000 before hostilities began, several agreements have been reached including joint communiqués, acknowledgments, and resolutions, which totaled all in all to 39. Sixteen of these agreements were provisions for the implementation of the ceasefire, which involves creation of the ceasefire committees, technical working groups, deployment and repositioning of troops and other safety and security agreements. Other agreements deal with the framework of the talks (13), on procedural matters (6), and on verification and recognition of MILF camps (4). However, there was no resolution made on the substantive issues brought out by the MILF.¹⁴⁴

The on and off characteristics of the peace negotiations between the GRP and MILF during the period was due to the lack of sincerity on both sides to resolve the conflict. This was because both sides were strictly tied to their respective interests that restricted the peace talks' progress. On the one hand, the GRP is hard bent on insisting that the conflict will be resolved within the context of the Philippine constitution. On the

¹⁴¹ ICG Asia Report, 6.

¹⁴² David, 102.

¹⁴³ Fermin and Lourdes Adriano, Elisa Buctuanon, Alexandra Tanada-Medina and Ronald Amorado, "*Mindanao's agenda for Peace and Development*" cited from Rizal G Buendia, 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ Soliman Santos Jr, "Dynamics and Directions of the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front" (2004), cited from USIP Special Report, 5.

other hand, the MILF will not compromise the issue of independence.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the condition was a major confrontation waiting to happen, which eventually exploded in the year 2000.

Noticeably, there are two factors that were absent during the peace initiatives of the GRP from 1996 to 2000 that may have contributed to the failure of the peace talks. One is the absence of a third party participation in the peace process. A third party facilitator or mediator could have guided the two adversaries in a more peaceful collaborative dialogue. It should be noted that the success of GRP-MNLF was largely credited to the active participation of Indonesia and the OIC. The other one is the absence of major battles between the military and the MILF prior to 2000. Major confrontation is also important because the high cost of human lives and property and other forms of hardship create a traumatic effect that makes the resumption of fighting more unlikely. Besides, the major battles largely weakened the MILF. These two factors that are present today, in the term of President Arroyo, create better opportunities to resolve the conflict.

When President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became President in 2001 after President Estrada was ousted by a civil-military protest over allegations of corruption, she immediately offered a ceasefire and invited the MILF rebels to the peace negotiations. Her efforts brought into the picture some external actors like Malaysia and Libya, which were responsible in facilitating the 2001 agreement in Tripoli that outlines the substance of the peace negotiations.

B. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON PEACE AGREEMENTS

Since the resumption of the peace talks in 2001, there have been several agreements achieved by the GRP-MILF negotiating panels. These agreements were crucial to the cessation of hostilities on the ground and in simplifying the framework agenda from the nine point agenda raised by the MILF before the escalation of hostilities in the year 2000. However, it was in the middle part of 2003 when these agreements started to show stabilizing effects and progress to implementation because of the resumption of hostilities in February 2003, which disrupted the peace talks for three months. Nevertheless, the peace negotiations have continued and have now reached a

¹⁴⁵ Santos Jr., 9.

breakthrough on how to tackle the most complicated ancestral domain agenda. There is now a good prospect that a comprehensive final peace agreement will be reached by the middle of the year 2006.

The importance of these peace agreements characterize Oulett's definition of peace agreements as those "intended to end a violent conflict, or at least transform that conflict in a significant way into one that is approached more constructively."¹⁴⁶ These agreements are a combination of (1) pre-negotiation agreements that deal with cessation of hostilities and confidence building measures; agreements on (2) framework or substantive issues, which address the wide scope of issues concerning the conflict's root causes, consequences and the commitment to resolve the problems peacefully; and (3) the implementation agreements, which puts in detail agreements on how the substantive issues will be implemented.¹⁴⁷

President Arroyo's peace initiatives resulted in the resumption of the peace talks between the GRP and the MILF, which was formalized on June 22, 2001 in Tripoli, Libya, wherein both parties reaffirmed the "Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities" and the "General Framework of the Agreement of Intent" signed by both parties in July 18, 1997 and August 27, 1998 respectively. Both the GRP and MILF committed to a "negotiated political settlement of the Bangsamoro problem," and to an enduring peace and stability in Mindanao in which Malaysia was recognized as a third party facilitator. Most importantly, the agreement has outlined the three substantive agenda of security, rehabilitation, and ancestral domain, much more simplified and workable issues than those nine agenda presented by the MILF in the past.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Julian Ouelett, "Peace Agreements," *Beyond Intractability*, eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. (Sept 2003) Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A., http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/structuring_peace_agree.jsp (accessed 12 Oct 05).

¹⁴⁷ Christine Bell, "Peace Agreements and Human Rights," (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000), 19-25, cited from Julian Ouelett, "Peace Agreements," *Beyond Intractability*. Ed. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. (Sept 2003), Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A., http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/structuring_peace_agree.jsp (accessed 12 Oct 05).

¹⁴⁸ "GRP-MILF Signed Agreements," Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), http://www.opapp.gov.ph/PANEL?MILF?milf_main.htm (accessed 02 October 05).

Since then, several implementing agreements were agreed upon. A joint communiqué issued on August 7, 2001 stated an agreement for the implementation of guidelines to cease hostilities. This was signed by President Arroyo in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and the invitation was extended to both local and international monitoring teams to oversee the cessation of hostilities. On May 6, 2002, both parties agreed to jointly contend with criminal syndicates and lost commands operating in Mindanao through the creation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group. This group would be composed of representatives from both parties and would coordinate actions against the criminal syndicates. This was followed by an agreement on implementing guidelines of the humanitarian, rehabilitative, and developmental aspects on May 7, 2002.¹⁴⁹

However, the peace process was disrupted because of the kidnapping-for-ransom group, particularly the Pentagon gang, which was believed to be hiding in MILF territories. On February 11, 2003, the AFP launched a battalion size combat operation in the Buliok complex in Pikit North Cotabato in the interest of capturing criminal elements in the area. However, the AFP's intention was regarded as doubtful considering the Buliok complex was the new headquarters of the MILF after the fall of Camp Abubakar in 2000. Hence, it was viewed as a direct attack against the MILF and a firefight ensued between the AFP and MILF forces. As a result, Salamat Hashim called for Jihad in the wake of the offensive, which was immediately followed by a series of six bombings in Mindanao (Kabacan, Cotabato city, Koronadal, Davao city, Tagum and Tacurong) in four weeks.¹⁵⁰ Strong suspicions for such bombings were directed towards the MILF's link with terrorists, especially the Davao airport bombing, which killed twenty-two people. These were followed by large attacks of MILF members on municipalities of Maigo, Lanao del Norte, Siocon, and Zamboanga del Norte that killed dozen of civilians.

In view of these attacks, the government responded strongly. Arroyo ordered air and artillery attacks against terrorist cells embedded in the MILF areas and called on the MILF leadership to renounce terror or suffer the consequence of being designated as a

¹⁴⁹ "GRP-MILF Signed Agreements."

¹⁵⁰ ICG Report, 7.

terrorist group on the list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTO).¹⁵¹ Despite the interlude of violence and accusation on both sides, the peace initiative was able to survive through a series of back channeling and exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁵² On 28 March 2003, both the GRP and the MILF issued a joint statement for their commitment to achieve a comprehensive, just, and lasting political settlement of the conflict; mutual restraint to minimize violence; and activation of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), which would normalize the situation and implement other confidence building measures.¹⁵³

Currently, the GRP-MILF peace negotiations have successfully hurdled the pre-negotiation phase (cessation of hostilities) and have made gains on the substantive issues of security, rehabilitation, and ancestral domain,¹⁵⁴ but they have yet to tackle the negotiated political settlement. In this case, the solution may be creating a wider autonomous local government for the Moros, creating a Moro state under a Parliamentary Federalist Philippines, or granting independence to the Moros in areas where they are the majority.¹⁵⁵

The security agenda provides for the progressive resolution of the Bangsamoro problem with honor, justice and integrity for all sectors of the society. It also allows for wider participation of the Bangsamoro people in the peaceful resolution of the conflict through consultations. Unlike past negotiations, the parties expressed their invitation for the OIC to observe the implementation of the GRP-MILF agreements. The parties have also committed themselves to strengthen the agreement on the general cessation of hostilities in which they have authorized the deployment of an international monitoring team that will be constituted with members of the OIC.¹⁵⁶ In line with this, the following actions have been undertaken: formation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) on

¹⁵¹ICG Report, 7.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “GRP-MILF Signed Agreements.”

¹⁵⁴ Nathan Quimpo, “Options in the Pursuit of a Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in Mindanao” (29 September 2000), <http://www.philsol.nl/fora/NL00a-Quimpo.htm> (accessed 28 Oct 05).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ “GRP-MILF Signed Agreements.”

September 6, 2003, purposely against criminal elements, wherein a total of five teams were put in place covering fifteen provinces in Mindanao; formation of the local monitoring teams as a support mechanism for ceasefire implementation; completion of the phased re-deployment program of AFP troops from Buliok complex; dropping of charges against MILF leaders and members who had been initially implicated in the Davao bombings; and the deployment of a 60 man international monitoring team (IMT), composed of representatives from Malaysia and Brunei Darusallam with three Libyan monitors on October 2004.¹⁵⁷

The rehabilitation agenda provides for the adherence to the international humanitarian law, protection of evacuees and displaced persons, and ensures their fundamental right to self determination. Furthermore, the MILF was also given the authority and responsibility to undertake and manage the rehabilitation of the affected areas. However, in cases where government funds are used, the government rules and procedures take precedence. Thirdly, the parties guarantee not only the safe and orderly return of the evacuees from their respective places of origins but will provide resources or reparations in order to start anew. Moreover, the rehabilitation aspect emphasizes the importance of the cessation of hostilities as a major building block towards the successful return of the refugees and normalization of their lives.¹⁵⁸ So far, some of the concrete gains on the rehabilitation agenda include the following: establishment of a Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) through the World Bank in 7 October 2003; conduct of MDTF Joint Needs Assessment in selected areas of 13 provinces affected by the conflict; and the formation of the Bangsamoro Development Authority, which is intended to undertake the rehabilitation and development programs in the conflict affected areas.¹⁵⁹

Lastly, the agreement emphasizes the importance of resolving the aspect of the ancestral domain agenda, which refers to the issue of ancestral land that the Bangsamoro people claim as traditionally and communally owned. This was the hardest to tackle among the talking points because the issue infringes on property rights law. Identifying

¹⁵⁷ “GRP-MILF Signed Agreements.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

and getting back those lands identified by the MILF as Bangsamoro's ancestral land from the landowners (by virtue of land titles in their names) is certainly problematic and complex. Hence, it was left unresolved during the 2001 Tripoli agreement of peace and it was agreed to discuss the details later.¹⁶⁰ There was not much progress on this agenda because both panels made the security and rehabilitation issues take priority. The negotiating panel saw the need to put up more mechanisms on ground to ensure that the ceasefire is being observed in the field and prevent incidents that may drag the military and the MILF rebels to renewed hostilities, similar to what happened in early 2003 when the peace talks were disrupted because of large scale military operations against a criminal syndicate in the MILF area. In September 2005, the GRP-MILF negotiating panel scored a major breakthrough on the contentious issue of ancestral domain in their round of talks in Malaysia. The two panels have successfully arrived at an agreement on how to approach the issue of ancestral domain. Along this line, Secretary Afable, chief government negotiator, has announced that an ancestral domain agreement is likely to be reached in December and that the prospects of a final peace agreement are high in mid 2006.¹⁶¹

C. PEACE MECHANISMS ON THE GROUND

The Ceasefire Committee on Cessation of Hostilities, the International Monitoring Team, the Local Monitoring Teams and the Ad Hoc Joint Action Groups are all peace mechanisms on the ground that ensure the success of the ceasefire in the field. They have proven very effective in preventing ceasefire violations and preventing incidents of armed encounters from escalating. The members of the GRP-MILF peace panels play a very significant role in the peace process because they address the issues and negotiate several agreements. However, the peace panels can only advance the level of talks if the ceasefire agreement is being observed and implemented by both adversaries on the ground. Instances in the past have shown a big gap between the progress on the negotiating table and the behavior of the forces in the field. For example, the attack on

¹⁶⁰ "GRP-MILF Signed Agreements."

¹⁶¹ Government of the Philippines, "Mindanao Peace Talks moving faster, peace agreement seen early next year," *relief Web*, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/MIRA-6GG5LL?OpenDocument> (accessed 03 Oct 05).

the rebels' camp in the Buliok complex that disrupted the ceasefire in early 2003 (between the GRP and MILF) was launched by the military at the time when government peace negotiators were about to present a draft of the peace agreement with the MILF.¹⁶² Similarly, the MILF field units have committed ceasefire violations in the past. Currently, this gap is being addressed carefully by these aforementioned peace mechanisms that oversee the implementation of the ceasefire agreement through coordination, monitoring and fact finding missions.

The Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), with representatives from both parties, acts as the overall body that addresses all the issues regarding the ceasefire and incidents of violations. Its effort is supported by the International Monitoring Teams (IMT), composed mainly of members of the Malaysian Armed Forces with a few from Libya and Brunei Darussalam. The participation of the IMT strengthens both the GRP and MILF commitment to peace because it provides neutral observation of the condition and incidents of violation in the area. Local Monitoring Teams (LMT) were also established on identified hotspots areas. These LMTs conduct active ceasefire awareness programs to develop local support, aside from doing on scene investigations of reported violations. These are composed of five representatives from each group with the participation of local NGOs. The last, but not the least, is the GRP-MILF Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), which serves as a coordinating body against criminal elements. AHJAG ensures that mis-encounters between government forces and the MILF rebels are avoided when pursuing the criminal elements in Mindanao.¹⁶³

The effectiveness of these peace mechanisms is shown by the fact that the conditions on the ground have already normalized and are now relatively more stable than two years ago. Records show that from January 1 to July 18, 2003, there were 528 ceasefire violations. Suddenly, incidents of violations declined to only 31 from July to December 2003. Likewise, the whole year of 2004 from January to December saw a

¹⁶² ICG Report, 7.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 18-19.

decline to only about 70, without serious armed confrontation.¹⁶⁴ This stabilizing effect of the peace mechanisms also proved effective in preventing serious violation from escalating into large scale hostilities. In January 10, 2005, about 100 MILF guerrillas under Abdul Rahman Binago simultaneously attacked army detachments in Linantangan, Mamasapano and Labo-Labo in Sharif Aguak, both in Maguindanao, which left eight (8) soldiers and thirteen (13) MILF rebels dead. The ceasefire monitors immediately informed the military and MILF leadership to act decisively on the incident, which prevented the fighting from escalating.¹⁶⁵ In the succeeding investigation, the Ceasefire Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities found the local MILF leader guilty of the ceasefire violation. It was learned that the attack was a personal decision of the local MILF commander that was carried out to avenge the recent death of his criminal brother in an encounter with government troops. In this regard, the MILF leadership deactivated its 105th rebel guerilla base command for six months starting in April, and indefinitely suspended two deputy commanders involved in the attack, who are also reportedly having collusion with JI terrorists.¹⁶⁶ Since then, no serious violations have occurred to this date.

D. THE MILF'S DEMANDS

Going into the peace negotiations and affirming to accept a negotiated political solution seems to indicate the MILF's readiness to compromise on the issue of independence, but this is not yet the case. Inspired by East Timor in 2000, the MILF's pronouncement to accept a negotiated political settlement has been obscured by its insistence to hold a UN sponsored referendum for independence in areas where the Muslims are the majority.¹⁶⁷ Considering the MILF's demands from the start of the peace negotiations in 1997, it remained consistent from the very beginning.

¹⁶⁴ United Press International, "21 Killed in Army-MILF clash" accessed from The Washington Times at <http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20050110-065742-2228r.htm> (accessed 11 Oct. '05).

¹⁶⁵ Jaime Laude, "21 Killed in Army-MILF clash", *STAR*, 11 Jan 05, <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl101588.htm> (accessed 11 Oct 05).

¹⁶⁶ Jim Gomez, "MILF Claims disciplined Guerillas on Suspected Terror Links", Associated Press, 09 Oct 05, http://newsinq7.net/breaking/index.php?index=1&story_id=52801 (accessed 11 Oct 05).

¹⁶⁷ Buendia, 10.

At its initial peace negotiation with the GRP in 1997 during the time of President Ramos, the MILF presented a single talking point referred to as “the solution to the Bangsamoro problem” which involved various social, cultural, political and economic issues but are not limited to the following:

1. ancestral domain;
2. displaced and landless Bangsamoro;
3. destruction of properties and war victims;
4. human rights issues;
5. social and cultural discrimination;
6. corruption of the mind and the moral fiber;
7. economic inequities and widespread poverty;
8. exploitation of natural resources;
9. agrarian reform.¹⁶⁸

Finding a lasting political solution to these issues and concerns form the core of the MILF agenda with the end view being to “establish a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people.”¹⁶⁹ On June 14, 2000, the MILF recommended the following solutions to the Bangsamoro problem:

1. recognition of the Bangsamoro as a distinct people and nation;
2. restitution of the ancestral domain to the Bangsamoro people;
3. reparation of damages caused by injuries to life, liberty and property;
4. exclusive control of the Bangsamoro people over their national governance, security and national resources;
5. identification, investigation, and prosecution of persons for war crimes and violations of human rights before an international tribunal for war crimes;

¹⁶⁸ Santos Jr., 6.

¹⁶⁹ MILF Technical Committee on Agenda setting, “Agenda” (25 February 1997), cited from Santos Jr, 11.

6. pronouncement of a public apology by the GRP to the Bangsamoro people for the crimes and harm caused by their subjugation, oppression and exploitation.¹⁷⁰

Santos points out the MILF's use of the word "system," which does not directly refer to independence, but rather shows flexibility to accommodate a political solution so long as it is acceptable to the Bangsamoro people. On the contrary, the message of these demands was very clear that the MILF wanted a territory, which refers to its claims of ancestral domain and a sovereign government of its own, by citing exclusive control of governance, security, and national resources. It was in no way compromising the issue of independence, especially at the time when they were poised to challenge government sovereignty in the year 2000, inspired by the success of East Timor. In fact, in an interview with Crescent International in 1999, the late Chairman Salamat Hashim emphasized the MILF's demand for nothing less than independence in areas of Mindanao where the Moros are the majority, which was consistent to the MILF's end goal of establishing a separate Islamic state in Mindanao.¹⁷¹ Clearly, independence was the position held by the MILF when it pulled out of the peace process during an escalation of violence with government forces in June 2000. Bishop Quevedo also cited several pronouncements that Salamat made as reasons for new hopes for peace. These are his renunciation of terrorism, his realization that the historical circumstances restricting the Bangsamoro people cannot be overturned, and his declaration that the final solution to the conflict is by way of political settlement.¹⁷² However, these pronouncements do not directly mean the MILF is giving up its quest for independence, although it guarantees the MILF's interest in peaceful negotiations.

Today, it seems the new chairman, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, is echoing mixed messages. In a recent interview, he said that the MILF is ready to sign "a negotiated

¹⁷⁰ "Position Papers of Technical Working Groups on Six (6) Clustered Agenda Items", 14 June 2000, cited from Santos Jr., 6.

¹⁷¹ Crescent International, "Bangsamoro Muslims' determination to establish an Islamic State, interview with MILF chairman Hashim Salamat," <http://www.muslimedia.com/archives/sea99/intv-milfl.htm> (accessed 16 Aug 05).

¹⁷² ACPD Background, "Working for Peace in Mindanao," May 2004, <http://www.acpd.org/uappeals/bgground/mindanao.html> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

political solution that is just, lasting and comprehensive in order to terminate the age-old conflict in Mindanao." However, he also said in a different pronouncement that the MILF would never compromise the right of the Bangsamoro people to self-determination, referring to independence.¹⁷³ In several pronouncements, the MILF has ruled out any possibility for autonomy as a political option in view of the MNLF 1976 and 1996 peace agreement's failure to deliver peace and development in the region.¹⁷⁴ However, it seems silent to the idea of a Bangsamoro state under a parliamentary federal republic of the Philippines. Between two extreme issues of autonomy and independence, a Moro state in a federal government seems to be a likely compromise and a win-win solution rather than going back to the war path.

Presumably, the MILF will still vie for the same thing, a referendum for independence, when the formal peace negotiations begin in 2006. However, there is also a big possibility that the MILF will settle for something less than independence due to the incentives of peace and the fact that it has been weakened by the year 2000 major military offensive, and because independence has no support from the international community as discussed in chapter IV. Nonetheless, the MILF commitment to work on a negotiated political settlement is yet to be seen during the actual negotiation, if it will compromise or not on its demand for independence.

E. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

Based on past negotiations with Moro rebels, the GRP always limits its solution within the bounds of the republic's constitution; specifically its adherence to protect the national territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state that is well expressed in the 1987 constitution.¹⁷⁵ This being the case, it rules out the possibility of yielding to the MILF's demand for independence and only allows provisions for autonomy in dealing with secessionist struggles, as in the cases of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) and MNLF who were both given autonomy in the past. In fact, the rushed proposed draft offered to the MILF, in time for President Bush's visit to the country in 2002, by the GRP

¹⁷³ "Autonomy not an answer," *Inquirer News Service*, http://news.inq7.net/regions/index.php?index=1&story_id=14799 (accessed 07 Oct 05).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Santos Jr., 59 .

was a “meaningful autonomous government,” which is actually an expanded version of the existing autonomous region for Muslim Mindanao.¹⁷⁶ However, based on the recent political developments in the country, the Philippines is seeing a shift to a parliamentary federal system of government. This development opens a window of opportunity for the Moros to be accommodated in a distinct Bangsamoro state. So far, it is the most visible political option of the government for the MILF, although its official stance is yet to be seen in the formal peace negotiations.

F. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Prendergast and Plumb underscore the capability of the civil society organizations in supporting the implementation of peace agreements towards sustainable peace for two reasons: firstly, they have the capability to bridge conflictual communities, and secondly, they can serve as a pressure group to political leaders to remain working toward the peaceful negotiation of the conflict.¹⁷⁷ In relation to this, Santos sees the presence of peace advocates in Mindanao as one of the brightest hopes for the Mindanao peace process. Networking for peace became an advocacy for seriously concerned groups to support the process through a coalition known as *Mindanao Peaceweavers*. The coalition includes the Agung Network, Bishops-Ulama Forum (BUF), Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference (MPAC), Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC), Mindanao People’s Peace Movement (MPPM), Mindanao Solidarity Network (MSN), and Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ).¹⁷⁸

In the affected areas, they have been involved in one way or another in promoting a culture of peace through education, research, relief and rehabilitation of evacuees, interfaith dialogue, reconciliation and healing, and other initiatives. These groups are bridging the gap between the larger communities in conflict and addressing animosities between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao. They also exerted their influence on political leaders to continue the peace talks in 2003. In fact, the success of the ceasefire

¹⁷⁶ “Draft GRP-MILF Peace Agreement,” *Mindanews*, <http://www.mindanews.com/peprcs/milf/draft.shtml> (accessed 15 Sept 05).

¹⁷⁷ John Prendergast and Emily Plumb, “Building Local Capacity: From Implementation to Peace Building” in *Ending Civil Wars: the Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds. Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens. (U.S.A.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 327-330.

¹⁷⁸ Santos Jr., 40-41.

between the GRP and MILF, that is holding up to now, can be largely credited to the MPC initiated grassroots led “Bantay Ceasefire” (Ceasefire Watch). So far, it has done a great support to the local monitoring teams by conducting inspections and field investigations of reported violations.¹⁷⁹

Among these civil society organizations, the participation of the Bishop-Ulama conference provides the greatest hope for bridging the two ethnic communities in conflict based on the religious character of both Christian and Muslim Filipinos. Despite decades of conflict, the religious institutions in Mindanao remain an influential sector with a wide network of churches and mosques in almost every village where people go to pray and listen to their religious leaders. The BUC has shown active participation in the peaceful resolution of the conflict, particularly in the year 2000 when it called on the government and the MILF to go back to the negotiating table and clarified that the conflict is not a religious war,¹⁸⁰ thus preventing the occurrence of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims. Undoubtedly, reconciliation can take off at the village level through the active support and administration of the religious leaders.

G. THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

The ongoing political crisis in the Philippines that threatens President Arroyo’s position brings both positive and negative effects to the peace process with the MILF. On the one hand, in the event of more serious political instability in the future leading to a possible ouster of President Arroyo, the peace negotiations and its gains may be jeopardized and discontinued by the succeeding regime. The crisis also casts doubts on the viability of the government to enter into a peace agreement with the MILF, given the uncertainty of continuity brought about by the political crisis. On the other hand, the crisis has opened a greater window of opportunity to amend the constitution, wherein the Presidential unitary system will be changed to a parliamentary federal system of government. In effect, this increases the prospect of a Bangsamoro state where the Moros could exercise a high degree of self-determination. In the meantime, everything is

¹⁷⁹ Santos Jr., 40-41.

¹⁸⁰ Bishop Antonio Ledesma, “A ten point Program for Peace in Mindanao (Perspective from the Bishops-Ulama Forum),” <http://www.philsol.nl/A00a/Bishop-Ulama-Program-may00.htm> (accessed 08 Oct 05).

dependent on how the political crisis will develop. Hence, it is noteworthy to examine the crisis.

The political crisis stemmed from allegations of electoral fraud against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who was declared the winner by almost a million vote margin over her closest rival Fernando Poe Jr. in the May 2004 Presidential elections. Accusations of fraud by the opposition party didn't get much public attention until one year after, when a wiretapped conversation, between President Arroyo and Virgillo Garcillano, was exposed to the public in June 2005.¹⁸¹ This was indicative of manipulation, since Garcillano was a ranking official of the commission on election, and the conversation allegedly occurred during the election period. Allegedly, the 2004 national election was rigged in favor of the President and her political allies.¹⁸² The tape created a public outrage and prompted several calls for President Arroyo to resign. On June 27, three weeks after the tape was exposed and played by the media, the President denied the allegations of electoral fraud over the national television broadcast. However, she admitted it was her voice on tape. This admission dragged down the President's popularity rating. Public opinion surveys conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS) in Manila showed her rating of trust reduced to 17 %, and 59 % viewed her actions as cheating.¹⁸³ A similar survey conducted by Pulse Asia Survey showed 69 % lost trust in the President.

Political opponents spearheaded by the United Opposition (UNO), a coalition of political parties composed mainly of former Estrada and Fernando. Poe, Jr. (now deceased) supporters¹⁸⁴ further intensified protests for the President's resignation. Several other universities and colleges joined the GMA resign-movement, including the prominent De la Salle University, which even paid a daily newspaper for a full page ad.

¹⁸¹ Patrick Patino, "Philippine Political Crisis: Issues, Balance of Forces, Scenarios," Aug 05, <http://qc.indymedia.org/print.php?id=4277> (accessed 03 Oct 05).

¹⁸² "2005 Philippine electoral crisis," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_electoral_crisis,_2005 (accessed 03 Oct 05).

¹⁸³ Patino, "Philippine Political Crisis."

¹⁸⁴ Poe's death in December 14, 2004 was due to a massive stroke, "Poe Passes Away," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Dec. 04, http://news.inq7.net/top/index.php?index=1&story_id=21164 (accessed 08 Oct '05).

This was followed by a serious blow from her own government on July 8, 2005 when ten members of her cabinet filed their irrevocable resignation and asked President Arroyo to resign, citing the issue of “leadership and credibility” by the President to lead the Filipino people.¹⁸⁵ This was followed by similar calls for resignation from the senate President, Franklin Drilon, the influential Makati Business Club, and former President Corazon Aquino.

Four months after, the political situation remains volatile due to the persistence of street protests and also because of the continuing rift between the Senate and the Executive Department over issues of inquiries being conducted by the senate. One example is the inquiry on the controversial *venable* contract,¹⁸⁶ in which the National Security Affairs Secretary Norberto Gonzales was ordered to be detained by senators for not cooperating with the senate inquiry by not answering simple and direct questions.¹⁸⁷ Irked by the Senate’s grilling of Gonzales, President Arroyo accused the senators of using the inquiries “in aid of destabilization” and not “in aid of legislation.” She issued executive order 464, an order barring high government officials to attend senate inquiries without her approval. The senators responded by asking the Supreme Court to junk EO 464.¹⁸⁸

Despite the intensity of protests and maneuverings by her political opponents, the President remains in power due to two powerful institutions in the country and the support of her political allies in the House of Representatives. The church and the military, which have always been very crucial in the nation’s history of removing controversial Presidents through people power in the past (like the cases of former President Marcos in 1986 and Estrada in 2001), did not support widespread calls for the

¹⁸⁵ Patino, “Philippine Political Crisis.”

¹⁸⁶ Venable contract is a deal with a U.S. lobby group to solicit funding from the US government in relation with the plan to amend the Philippine constitution. Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Juliet Labog-Javellana “Palace plans to challenge legality of Senate grilling” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 27 Sept 05, http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=1&story_id=51470 (accessed 11 Oct 05).

¹⁸⁷ Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Juliet Labog-Javellana “Palace plans to challenge legality of Senate grilling” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 27 Sept 05, http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=1&story_id=51470 (accessed 11 Oct 05).

¹⁸⁸ Jose Rodel Clapano, “16 senators ask SC to junk EO 464”, *The Philippine Star*, 12 Oct 05 (Philippine date and time), <http://www.philstar.com/philstar/News200510120404.htm> (accessed 11 Oct 05).

President to resign. In an official statement, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) called for the restoration of moral values in Philippine politics, but did not ask the President to resign and instead, prayerfully supported her to find a solution to the crisis.¹⁸⁹ The military, on its part, maintained its political neutrality. The Chief of Staff declared “the military will not intervene in the political developments and instead continue to provide security and protect the democratic process.”¹⁹⁰ So far, both the church and the military have been sufficient support groups for President Arroyo’s cling to power. Moreover, the President also enjoys the support of her political allies in the House of Representatives. In fact, the impeachment complaint against her did not progress in Congress because of lack of support from the representatives. Based on the Philippine constitution, an impeachment complaint shall have the endorsement of one-third of the members of the House of Representatives, which the opposition failed to muster.¹⁹¹ Seemingly, calls for her resignation have been tempered also by the President’s decision to hasten the constitutional amendment to shift the system of government into a parliamentary federal republic.

The move to change the constitution towards a parliamentary federalist government is gaining support from prominent political personalities and institutions. Former President Ramos and the incumbent speaker of the House of Representatives Jose De Venecia, who both belong to the ruling *Lakas Christian-Muslim Democrats (CMD)* political party are in the forefront in support to the charter change. In fact, during the height of persistent calls for President Arroyo to resign, Ramos was the one who recommended charter change as the best alternative to the political condition of the country, and the crisis as well.¹⁹² His support for President Arroyo during the height of the political crisis and his charter change solution seemed influential to scale down calls for President Arroyo to resign. This only shows that the former President still commands

¹⁸⁹ Patino, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹¹ “Article XI, Section 3 of the Philippine Constitution,” <http://www.ldb.org/philcon/artacc.htm> (accessed 11 Oct 05).

¹⁹² “House chief backs village meet on charter change,” *Sun star network*, 08 Aug 05, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/static/net/2005/08/08/house.chief.backs.village.meets.on.charter.change.html> (accessed 25 Nov 05).

a high level of influence in the country. At the House of Representatives, speaker de Venecia and his allies are working fast on a house resolution that will amend the present constitution. He also endorses a team of about 100 civil society leaders and Charter reform advocates from the "Coalition of Citizens for Charter Change Now!" in making dialogue and consultations with the people nationwide.¹⁹³ The Union of Local Association of the Philippines (ULAP) and the League of Provinces in the Philippines (LPP) also support the charter change. These groups are composed of local officials in the country, such as governors and mayors of provinces and municipalities respectively. In fact, these local officials support the call for a review within 2-3 months of the 1987 Charter by Congress as a Constituent Assembly.¹⁹⁴ Another strong proponent for the shift to the parliamentary federal system is the Citizen's Movement for Federalism in the Philippines (CMFP), headed by Jose V. Abueva.

Abueva argues for the need to change to a parliamentary federalist system of government, citing several good reasons that will eventually solve the country's political woes. He cited that the ruling class has exercised political power through a highly centralized unitary system of government based in "Imperial Manila," which has the local governments acting similarly to colonial states except for having the influence on votes.¹⁹⁵ He argues that the lack of good governance under the unitary-Presidential system in the current Philippine style of democracy has aggravated the Filipinos' condition while benefiting the ruling elite.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, Hutchcroft and Rocamora cited the Philippine democracy's deficit in uplifting the lives of the Filipinos in which hegemonic elite dominate the electoral process in particularistic politics rather than programmatic ones. They argue for the need to reform democratic structures and build stronger political systems that would make democracy more responsive to the citizenry in

¹⁹³ "House chief backs village meet on charter change,"

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Jose V. Abueva, "The unitary-Presidential system is outmoded," *Philippine daily inquirer* http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=4&story_id=45365 (accessed 04 Oct 05).

¹⁹⁶ Jose V. Abueva, "Some Advantages of Federalism and Parliamentary government for the Philippines," <http://www.pcij.org/blog/ucp-docs/Abueva-Federalism.pdf> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

general.¹⁹⁷ So far, CMFP has the most detailed vision of a parliamentary federal Philippines, which incorporates Bangsamoro as the tenth state.”¹⁹⁸ According to its draft, the states will gain vast powers of governance, particularly regarding security and economic aspects needed for development,¹⁹⁹ while the federal state will be mainly about national and international concerns for security, justice and economy.²⁰⁰ Abueva cited the Bangsamoro state for the Moros in Mindanao as one of the top priorities in a five to ten year implementation of the parliamentary federal shift.

In the past, amending the constitution for the shift to a parliamentary federal republic was met with suspicion by the people because of their poor trust in the politicians, regardless of its relevance. However, the issue of charter change has gained a brighter prospect today due to less suspicion and the growing need for it based on two political crises that have occurred in recent times. The idea of a charter change was first broached by former President Fidel V. Ramos in 1997. However, this did not materialize due to lack of support from influential people. Some sectors doubted his intention and viewed it as a ploy to perpetuate himself in power, since his term was about to end in 1998. No less than former President Corazon Aquino and Jaime Cardinal Sin, two influential people at the time, spearheaded large demonstrations against charter change

¹⁹⁷ Paul D. Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora, “Strong Demands and Weak institutions: The Origins and evolutions of democratic deficit in the Philippines” in *Journal of East Asian Studies* (2003) 259-292; http://www.ipd.ph/elections/resources/Hutchcroft_Rocamora%5B1%5D.JEAS.pdf (accessed 04 Oct 05).

¹⁹⁸ The eleven states: “(1) Ilocos-Cagayan Valley, (2) Cordillera, (3) Central Luzon, (4) Metro Manila; (5) Southern Tagalog, (6) Bicol, (7) Central-Eastern Visayas, (8) Western Visayas-Palawan, (9) Zamboanga Peninsula-Northern Mindanao, (10) Bangsamoro, and (11) Central Mindanao-Davao Region.” Jose V. Abueva, “The Unitary-Presidential system is outmoded,” *Inquirer news service*, http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=4&story_id=45365 (accessed 05 Oct 05)

¹⁹⁹ The states shall have “peace and order and public safety; agriculture, agrarian reform and fisheries; commerce, industry and tourism; natural resources, energy and environment; basic and vocational-technical education; health and sanitation; water and electrification; public works, transport and communication; social welfare and development; and development of regional languages, culture and the arts. Jose V. Abueva, “The Unitary-Presidential system is outmoded,” *Inquirer news service*, http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=4&story_id=45365 (accessed 05 Oct 05).

²⁰⁰ The federal state shall have jurisdiction on security and defense, foreign relations, the monetary and central banking system, citizenship and human rights in general, immigration and customs, national infrastructure, global trade, industry and globalization, the appellate judiciary and a new constitutional tribunal to deal with constitutional issues, Jose V. Abueva, “The Unitary-Presidential system is outmoded,” *Inquirer news service*, http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=4&story_id=45365 (accessed 05 Oct 05).

along with their followers, making the issue very unpopular then.²⁰¹ However, the political crisis that followed the term of President Ramos seemed to justify the necessity of a shift to a parliamentary federalist state. The ouster of President Estrada in January 2001, through the peoples' power, proved so divisive that the political condition of the country still suffers, even to this day. Had there been a parliamentary system, the crisis would have been addressed in the parliament through a "vote of no confidence," without the political cost of instability. Up to this day, the way President Estrada was removed from power is a rich source of debate as to the issue of its constitutionality. Such a condition is again evidenced by the present political crisis being faced by President Arroyo over the issue of alleged cheating in the May 2004 elections. The issue tends to drag the public again into chaotic street protests, which is by all means unhealthy to the political and economic condition of the country. Thus, the shift is likely to gain more support now than in the past because Ramos is no longer in power, and in view of the Estrada experience and the current political crisis.

H. OBSTACLES AND PROSPECTS OF THE PEACE PROCESS

The greatest obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the conflict is the MILF's demand for independence, which clashes with the constitutional provision on the "territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state," which is the primary responsibility of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.²⁰² As the primary sovereign law of the land, any amendment to it shall be subject to the approval of the Filipino people through a referendum nationwide, which makes it an exercise in futility for the Moros, owing to the vast majority of non-Muslim citizens in the country. Nevertheless, since the MILF has committed, along with the GRP, that the only way to resolve the conflict is through a negotiated political solution, there is a good chance that it may accept a solution other than independence. Furthermore, the independence issue does not stand on legal grounds in comparison with the case of East Timor, which the MILF derives inspiration since 2000. The Mindanao and Sulu archipelago were integrated under the 1935 constitution

²⁰¹ "No Cha-Cha, No to Charter Change"
<http://www.cpcabrisbane.org/Kasama/1997/V11n3/NoChaCha.htm> (accessed 08 Oct 05).

²⁰² "Section 3, Article II of the Philippines' 1987 Constitution,"
<http://www.gov.ph/aboutphil/consart2.asp> (accessed 09 Oct 05).

before the Philippine independence in 1946. In the case of East Timor, it was not part of Indonesia when Sukarno declared independence against the Dutch in 1945. It remained under the Portuguese administration until 1974. When the Portuguese left, East Timor was forcibly annexed by Indonesia in 1976.²⁰³ Hence, the UN sponsored referendum in East Timor was a case of a decolonization process that provides for the Timorese right to self-determination.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the MILF may loosen its stand for independence because it does not have international support even from Muslim countries which used to be its supporters in the past. Leading countries and inter-governmental institutions like U.S., Malaysia, Libya, and the OIC maintain their support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine republic as discussed in chapter IV. They recognize that the Bangsamoro problem can be resolved within the bounds of the Philippine constitution. In fact, the OIC still maintains its official recognition of the MNLF as the vanguard of the Bangsamoro people and not the MILF. This was further affirmed by Libyan President Muammar Al Qadhafi in the signing of the Tripoli agreement in June 2001 when he said that “Muslims in the Philippines can achieve peace and development only within the framework of the Republic of the Philippines and its constitutional guarantee of justice, equality, and mutual respect, of tolerance, of freedom from oppression, and freedom from discrimination.”²⁰⁵

Furthermore, the Philippine state will not allow the separation of any part of Mindanao because of its geographic and economic significance to the country’s viability. It is an all too important region having 1/3 of the country’s total land area and 22% of the population. It was generating as much as 20% of the country’s GDP by 1970, not to mention the vast mineral resources that have not been explored for economic benefits.²⁰⁶ In 1996, it accounted for 25% of rice production; 67% of cattle and tuna, and more than

²⁰³ Sar Desai, D. R. South East Asia: Past & Present (U.S.A.: Westview press, 2003, 5th edition), 293.

²⁰⁴ Buendia, 10.

²⁰⁵ Carolyn O. Arguillas, “Govt’s offer to the MILF: Expanded, strengthened, Autonomy, Amnesty, Demobilization, Assistance,” *Mindanews*, 3 June 2003 cited from Rizal G Buendia, “The GRP-MILF Peace Talks: Quo Vadis,” in *South East Asian Affairs* (2004), 213.

²⁰⁶ Fortunato U. Abat., *The Cencom Story: The day we nearly Lost Mindanao* (Quezon city: SBA Printers Inc.,1993) cited from Ricardo C Morales, NPS MA Thesis, “Perpetual War: Insurgencies in the Philippines,” (2003), 37.

50% of the corn, fish, chicken, and pork requirement of the whole country; 100% of pineapple, rubber, and banana exports; 90% of plywood, veneer and lumber; 63% of nickel reserves; 48.3 % of gold reserves; 38.5 % of forest area; and 38 % of farm land of the Philippines.²⁰⁷

Another obstacle is the disparity of understanding on the aspect of ancestral domain between the GRP and the MILF. On one hand, the government bases its perspective of ancestral domain from the 1997 Indigenous Peoples' Republic Act wherein it guarantees the right of the minority groups to claim collective ownership of their ancestral land but does not relieve the state of its power of eminent domain. On the other hand, the MILF sees it as exclusive control for territory and economic purposes.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, retaking the land from private registered owners, be they Christians or Muslims, is highly complicated, which if not handled carefully may result in more harm than good. It is also not clear if the MILF will also claim individual land properties owned by fellow Moros. Based on government records, the Moros have not filed their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADCs) in the past. Most of those who filed are members of indigenous communities in Mindanao and not the Moros.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Data provided by Mindanao peace advocate Magno Teves, cited from Soliman Santos Jr, "Dynamics and Directions of the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front," (2004), 30, <http://cpn.nd.edu/Dynamics%20of%20GRP-MILF%20Peace%20.pdf> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

²⁰⁸ Rizal G. Buendia, "The GRP-MILF Peace Talks: Quo Vadis," in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2004), 215.

²⁰⁹ Eric Gutierrez and Saturnino Borrás, "The Moro Conflict: Landlessness and Misdirected Policies," p. 40, in *East-West center-Washington*, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/pdfs/PS008.pdf> (accessed 08 Oct 05).

Table 5. Summary of Ancestral Domain Claims in Mindanao: 1998²¹⁰

Region	No. of CADCs	Indigenous Groups	Total Land (ha)
9	9	Samal, Subanen, Yakan, Kalibugan	52,742
10	9	Matigsalog-Manobo, Higa-onon, Bukidnon-Umayamnon, Subanen, Manobo-Higa-onon	129,308
11	13	T'Boli, Ubo, B'laan, Ata-Manobo, Tagacaolo, Kalagan, Obo-Manobo, Mandaya, Langilan-Ata Manobo	302,384
12	15	Manobo, Manobo-Aromanon, T'Boli, Tiruray, B'laan	31,305
13	3	Pukuan-Manobo, Higa-onon, Mamanua, Manobo	22,384
Total	49		538,123

Source: Bello et al. (1998: app.).

The current national political crisis poses a threat to the peace process and the goal of achieving sustainable peace. A case of another leadership change will obviously delay the peace negotiations and the agreements that have been initially made might be subject to scrutiny by a new administration. It is important that the peace process does not lose its momentum and will continue to head towards forging a final peace agreement.

Also, there is lack of support from the influential elites in Mindanao for the peace process. They seem to have a bystander attitude and are not supportive, if not directly opposed. These include provincial and municipal leaders such as “Lobregats of Zamboanga City, the Antoninos of General Santos city, Governor Daisy Avance Fuentes

²¹⁰ Sourced from Gutierrez and Borrás, Jr., 40.

of South Cotabato, Governor Manny Pinol of North Cotabato, and Mayor Rodrigo Duterte of Davao City.”²¹¹ Since the bulk of the problem is a land issue in which the MILF is claiming restitution of land within the context of ancestral domain, these political leaders will, more likely, clash over not granting concessions on behalf of their Christian *Bisayan* constituents.²¹²

Lastly, the presence of *spoilers* within the ranks of the MILF, who allegedly maintain an alliance with JI and the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao, pose a threat to the peace process. Stedman and Rothchild define spoilers as leaders or factions who use violence to undermine the implementation of agreements.²¹³ These rebels can sabotage the peace talks by committing violations of the ceasefire agreements and supporting terrorist activities of JI and the ASG, which may drag the MILF and government forces into an escalation of armed violence. In fact, a major violation of the ceasefire happened in January 2005 when a faction of some 100 MILF rebels attacked Army detachments in Linantangan, Mamasapano and Labo-Labo in Sharif Aguak, both in Maguindanao, leaving 8 government soldiers and 13 MILF rebels killed.²¹⁴

The recent announcement of the peace negotiating panel, in resolving the most contentious issue of ancestral domain (the last of the remaining substantive agenda), creates hope for the continuing progress of the peace process. In principle, the MILF has agreed to share the economic benefits derived from the ancestral lands, similar to the concept of royalty fees. Both panels are expected to resolve the issue for a political solution before the year ends, followed by the formal peace process early next year. As announced by the chief government negotiator, Secretary Afable, a final peace agreement

²¹¹ Santos Jr., 44.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Stephen John Stedman and Donald Rothchild, “Peace Operations: From Short Term to long Term Commitment,” *international Peace keeping*, no. 2 (summer 1996), pp. 17-35, cited from John Stedman et al, *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of the Peace Agreements*, (USA: Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc. , 2002), 9.

²¹⁴ Jaime Laude, “21 Killed in Army-MILF clash”, *STAR News*, 11 Jan 05, <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl101588.htm> (accessed 11 Oct 05).

may be signed by mid-year 2006.²¹⁵ Likewise, due to the hardworking and competent members of the Ceasefire Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, the International Monitoring team, the Local Monitoring team and the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group, the ceasefire is holding and the peace process is advancing. The resulting secured environment makes it conducive for the peace panels to negotiate for the political solution to the problem. It should be noted that in the past, ceasefires and peace negotiations were disrupted by incidents on ground that were not properly addressed locally, which even resulted in the escalation of violence in 2000 and the disruption of the ceasefire in 2003. Indeed, these peace mechanisms have been very effective, as shown by the large decline of reported ceasefire violations in the latter part of 2003, the whole of 2004, and in the year 2005.

The commitment of the MILF leadership in the peace negotiations seems to be holding as the MILF's central committee handed down disciplinary punishment to erring members. It deactivated its 105th rebel guerilla base command for six months, starting in April, and indefinitely suspended two of its deputy commanders over allegations of collusion with JI terrorists. The same base command was also involved in a ceasefire violation in January 2005, leaving a total of 27 soldiers and rebels dead.²¹⁶

Despite the political crisis, the Philippine government, under President Arroyo, remains strong and capable to negotiate peace with the MILF. Likewise, the move for a charter change brings hope to what could be a negotiated political settlement with the MILF in the future. Considering the two options of independence and autonomy at the extreme ends, accommodation of the Moros into a separate Bangsamoro state under a federalist Philippines may well be a good compromise. A Bangsamoro state offers more political powers to the Moros and less control from the federal government. In this way the Moros can exercise their sense of self-determination.

²¹⁵ Government of the Philippines, "Mindanao Peace Talks moving faster, peace agreement seen early next year," *Relief Web*, 21 Sept 05, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/MIRA-6GG5LL?OpenDocument> (accessed 03 Oct 05).

²¹⁶ Jim Gomez, "MILF Claims disciplined Guerillas on Suspected Terror Links", *Associated Press*, 09 Oct 05, http://newsinq7.net/breaking/index.php?index=1&story_id=52801 (accessed 11 Oct 05).

I. CONCLUSION

Based on the progress of the peace negotiations and the continuing success of the ceasefire on the ground, it is likely that a peace agreement will be signed between the GRP and the MILF in 2006. This can be gleaned from the fact that both parties have successfully addressed the three substantive agenda of security, rehabilitation, and the recent breakthrough on the ancestral domain issue, which provides for a good condition leading to the negotiation on the possible political solution. The probability of arriving at a peace agreement is further reinforced by the current political trend that provides for the good opportunity to amend the constitution which, in effect, would pave the way for a better alternative political solution than the clashing issues of autonomy and independence. In this regard, a Bangsamoro state under a federalist Philippines becomes a viable option, and may be a good compromise between competing positions of autonomy and independence, given the fact that the MILF has committed to a negotiated political settlement as the only solution to the conflict.

Apparently, there is a growing participation of the civil society organizations which also enhances the chances for a final peace agreement between the GRP and the MILF. These organizations have so far been involved in the peace process and have shown their significant importance in pressuring both sides to remain on the peace track. More importantly, these institutions can significantly help in further developing popular support for the peace process. These groups composed of both Christians, Muslims and the indigenous people of Mindanao, can work in a variety of ways to bring the peace agenda to the people at all levels, particularly the local politicians in the area who may have been opposed to granting concessions with the Moros. A pro-active civil society can definitely help popularize the peace process and sustain the level of intensity to resolve the conflict. These civil society organizations are likely to participate aggressively because these are located in Mindanao, whose members and communities are oftentimes victims of the fighting between GRP forces and the MILF. Being on the field has made them serious stakeholders for the successful resolution of the conflict and its sustainability.

IV. EXTERNAL ACTORS

This chapter looks at the participation of external actors and examines their commitment and significance to bringing about sustainable peace between the GRP and MILF. So far, multinational involvement in the conflict's peaceful settlement includes Malaysia, U.S., Libya, the OIC, the U.N., and the World Bank. The support of these countries and institutions enhances legitimacy to the peaceful solution and the viability of its success. Apparently, there is a good prospect for peace with the MILF due to the support of the aforementioned actors.

A. MALAYSIA

Malaysia has a strong commitment to help in the peaceful resolution of the conflict between the GRP and MILF. Its interest is mainly driven by its internal socio-economic and security concern due to the geographic proximity of its Sabah state to Mindanao. Its support to the peace process is somehow linked to its efforts to establish better diplomatic relations with the Philippines in view of resolving the Sabah territorial dispute in the future. Having taken the role as third party facilitator since 2001, Malaysia has served as “crucial catalyst in developing supportive relationship”²¹⁷ between the GRP and the MILF which successfully led to the progress of the peace process and big decline in ceasefire violations. It helped shape an attitude towards the conflict as “a problem to be solved and not as a contest to be won.”²¹⁸ Furthermore, the Malaysian government has shown its commitment by providing members of its military to act as international monitoring teams in Mindanao. Seemingly, Malaysia is fully committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, and its expressed support of the territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic is crucial to the political solution of the Bangsamoro problem.

The unstable security environment in the southern Philippines causes a huge influx of refugees and illegal immigrants to Sabah, Malaysia, which brings about socio-

²¹⁷ Fen Osler Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail* (U.S.A.: USIP, 1996), 12.

²¹⁸ John Burton, quoted from Fen Osler Hampson, *Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail* (U.S.A.: USIP, 1996), 12.

economic and demographic implications.²¹⁹ During the height of the secessionist war in the early 1970s, Sabah became the destination for hundreds of thousands of Filipino refugees and illegal immigrants so that by 1983, around 160,000 to 200,000 Moros were living in Sabah.²²⁰ Today, it poses a threat to non-Muslim political parties because the Moros and their descendants have become one-third of the population already.²²¹ During the migration period in the early 1970s, the government of Sabah state extended a policy of accommodation in view of humanitarian considerations until it realized the socio-economic implication of the refugees, who competed for resources and job opportunities with the Sabahans. Some have also been involved in a destabilizing street protest in 1986.²²² This condition prompted the state government to tighten its policies. Those illegal immigrants who arrived after 1976 were arrested and subsequently deported. This accounted for 4,281 deportations and detention of 11,912 Moros by 1989.²²³ However, because of the poor security situation and unfavorable economic conditions in Mindanao, Filipino Muslims continue to illegally immigrate to Sabah. In Malaysia's most recent drive against illegal immigrants in 2002, about 64,000 Filipinos had been forced to leave Malaysia's Sabah state and an estimated 4,000 Filipinos were waiting to be deported by August of that same year.²²⁴

The growing lawlessness in Mindanao has also become a threat to the internal security of Malaysia. Since 1979, there had been several incidents of piracy and intrusion of criminal elements from Mindanao. The bloodiest attack happened in August 1984 when Moro pirates killed 33 Malaysians at sea. They also figured in the armed robbery of a bank and Malaysian airline office which left 10 dead and 11 wounded.²²⁵ Aside from

²¹⁹ Santos Jr., 46.

²²⁰ Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar, "Malaysia-Philippines Relations: the Issue of Sabah" in *Asian Survey*, Vol.32, No. 6 (Jun., 1992), 559.

²²¹ Carlos Isagani T. Zarate, "Malaysia and the Mindanao Peace Process," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2004, http://www.inq7.net/opi/2004/mar/22/opi_kris-1.htm (accessed 28 Aug 05).

²²² Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar., 563.

²²³ Ibid, 560.

²²⁴ "Macapagal Asks KL's help in Repatriating Filipinos," *Agence France Press*, http://www.inq7.net/gbl/2002/aug/21/gbl_1-1.htm (accessed 14 Oct 05).

²²⁵ Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar, 560.

these, the most alarming incident, so far, was the daring raid made by the ASG from the Philippines in the year 2000 at a dive resort on Sipadan Island, Malaysia. The ASG kidnapped nine Malaysians, three Germans, two French, two South Africans, two Finns, a Lebanese woman and a Filipino, and then brought them to Sulu in Mindanao for a demand of \$1million for the release of each foreign hostage. The ASG reportedly profited around \$25 million.²²⁶ Certainly, it puts a black mark on Malaysia's security and tourism industry.

The participation of Malaysia in ending the MILF conflict fosters good relations with the Philippines, which may be a step towards the final settlement of the territorial dispute over Sabah in the future. The Philippines' claim to Sabah is based on House Resolution No. 42 adopted on 28 April 1950, which recognized the ownership of the heirs of the Sultan of Sulu over Sabah. That same house resolution authorized the President to negotiate on behalf of the sultan and authorized the Philippine President to negotiate for reasserting sovereignty of the island. In 1969, Malaysia suspended diplomatic ties with the Philippines because of the latter's Republic Act 5546 that incorporated Sabah as part of the Philippine territory.²²⁷ The relations worsened when the Jabitah incident took place in 1968, which exposed President Marcos' plan to retake Sabah through the use of force.²²⁸ Since then, Sabah became the training ground for the

²²⁶ Ronald J May, "Muslim Mindanao: Four years after the peace agreement," in *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2001), 271.

²²⁷ The ownership dispute between the Philippines and the Malaysian government over Sabah has become the thorny issue between the two countries' relations in the past. Sabah is now Malaysia's 13th state located ten miles from the southern border of the Philippines, consisting of more than 29,000 square miles. Based on historical and legal accounts, Sabah was owned by the Sultan of Brunei until it was ceded in 1704 as a token of gratitude to the Sultan of Sulu, who helped suppress a rebellion on the island. In 1878, the Sultan of Sulu had it leased to European merchants for 5,000 Malaysian dollars. This eventually became part of the British North Borneo Company, which later turned it over to the British government in 1946, assuming full sovereignty. The British government later granted it to the Federated Republic of Malaya on 16 September 1963, to which the Philippine government did not accord diplomatic recognition. Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar, "Malaysia-Philippines Relations: the Issue of Sabah" in *Asian Survey*, Vol.32, No. 6 (Jun., 1992), pp. 554-567, <http://links.jstore.org/sici?sici=0004-4687%28199206%3A6%3C554%3AMRTIOS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

²²⁸ President Marcos' plan was to retake Sabah by using the Jabitah forces composed mainly of *Tausugs* from Sulu. They would infiltrate Sabah and plant the seeds of rebellion among the *Tausugs* living there. This plan served as a strong provocation which may have prompted Malaysian leaders to support the Moro rebellion in Mindanao, particularly Tun Mustapha of Sabah, who was also a *Tausug* and then the chief minister of the state. David, 61.

Muslim rebels in Mindanao and the trans-shipment point for supplies coming from Libya, with the tacit agreement of the Malaysian government in the long years of the Moro rebellion.²²⁹ Apparently, the Sabah issue has triggered Malaysia's support for the Moro rebellion.

Malaysia now plays a key role in the GRP-MILF conflict resolution, being the main third party facilitator in the peace process. It acts as a guide toward developing collaborative behavior among the GRP-MILF panels in arriving at a consensus for the solution of the problem. It has been the venue of several exploratory talks, and has aided both parties in progressing in the peace process through various agreements.²³⁰ Its involvement in the peace process is further compounded by the deployment of its Malaysian peace monitors, headed by Maj. Gen. Dato Zulkifli Bin Mohd Zin, who arrived in the Philippines on October 10, 2004.²³¹ The international monitoring team is composed of 51 Malaysians,²³² with 10 from Brunei²³³ and 2 Libyan²³⁴ nationals. It assists in the implementation of a ceasefire agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).²³⁵ Malaysia also committed to help develop the Bangsamoro Development Agency through its Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP).²³⁶ It has made possible the signing of the agreement of unity between the two main Moro rebel factions, the MILF and the MNLF in a meeting held in Cyberjaya, Malaysia in 2001.²³⁷

²²⁹ Tan, 267.

²³⁰ Santos Jr., 45.

²³¹ Alcuin Papa, "Malaysian peace monitors arrive in RP," *Inquirer News Service*, http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=1&story_id=14414 (accessed 27 Nov 04).

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Bong S. Sarmiento, "Brunei contingent in International Monitoring Team arrives Oct. 20," *Mindanews*, 19 October 2004, <http://www.mindanews.com/2004/10/19nws-brunei.html> on (accessed 27 Nov 04).

²³⁴ Gilbert Filongo, "Libyan peace observers to arrive in Manila today," *gulfnews.com*, <http://www.gulf-news.com/Articles/WorldNF.asp?ArticleID=142538> (accessed 27 Nov 05).

²³⁵ Alcuin Papa, "Malaysian peace monitors arrive in RP," *Inquirer News Service*, http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=1&story_id=14414 (accessed 27 Nov 04).

²³⁶ Santos Jr., 45.

²³⁷ Soliman M Santos Jr., "Turning Things Around for Peace," *Mindanews*, <http://www.mindanews.com/2003/06/01vws-santos.html> (accessed 14 Oct 05).

As expressed, Malaysia does not support the independence struggle of the MILF anymore. Instead, its preferential approach is a track towards peace and development.²³⁸ Its policy on the peace process is outlined in the following political parameters: “the framework of the Philippine constitution, Tripoli agreement and Jakarta accord, respect for Philippine territorial integrity and sovereignty, no secession or independence, assurance of the rights of the Bangsamoro as citizens, MNLF-MILF unity to complement existing solutions, and for the Moro movement to combat radicalism and militant tendency.”²³⁹

B. THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. commitment in helping to end the MILF conflict is mainly driven by its security concerns against terrorism, its deep historical connection with the Philippines, and its exiting trade relations with the country. Currently, it is playing a supportive role in the peace process and has already expressed interest to help by offering development assistance in the event a peace agreement is signed. It may also take the lead for a multi-national peace keeping force that will provide a security guarantee²⁴⁰ and ensure the compliance of the GRP and MILF in the implementation phase of the comprehensive peace agreement in the future. Its commitment to provide resources and deploy its forces were seen in the year 2002 during the bilateral military exercise (code named *Balikatan*, meaning shoulder to shoulder), aimed at targeting the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group in Mindanao. Its expressed support of the territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic enhances the prospect for a political solution to the conflict.

The U.S.’ Global War on Terror policy makes it committed to the peaceful settlement of the MILF conflict due to the presence of terrorist groups in Mindanao, particularly Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf. It sees that a peaceful solution of the

²³⁸ Santos Jr., 45.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Security guarantee is a commitment of the third parties to deploy its own forces for the purpose of implementing the terms of the agreement. Critical security agreements such as disarmament and demobilization of forces need third parties to ensure that parties comply. Security guarantee also provides for the protection of the parties from attacks during the implementation. Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization* 51, no.3 (summer 1997), 340, cited from *Ending Civil Wars: the Implementation of Peace Agreements*, eds., Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, Elizabeth M. Cousens (U.S.A. & U.K.: Lynne Reiner Publishers, Inc., 2002), 5.

MILF conflict would prevent Mindanao from becoming a major breeding ground for terrorists, since having peace with the MILF would isolate these terrorists and deny them support and freedom of movement in the MILF controlled areas. This will also downplay the growing Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia because of the MILF's influential role in the region in the name of Islam.²⁴¹ In fact, it is the Global War on Terror that has brought a greater United States-Philippines security cooperation. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo offered the use of Philippine ports and airports for refueling U.S. ships and aircraft to help the U.S. war on terror. President George W. Bush reciprocated the favor by granting military assistance amounting to \$92 million in 2001 and a separate amount of \$55 million for U.S. economic aid for Muslim Mindanao, covering the years 2001 and 2002.²⁴² Between January and July 2002, the U.S. military personnel involved in "Balikatan exercise (shoulder to shoulder)" in the Philippines reached a peak of 1,200. The forces included some 150 Special Forces personnel involved in training the Philippine military in support of its combat operations against the terrorists in Mindanao, particularly against the ASG at that time. The military assistance was also complemented with civic action projects conducted by some 300 U.S. Navy engineers. The training exercise was largely credited for weakening the ASG, especially in the neutralization of some of its notorious leaders.²⁴³ The U.S.' shared security commitment in Mindanao was seen in its intention to replicate the gains of *Balikatan* military exercise by deploying approximately 3,000 troops in February 2003 in direct combat participation against the Abu Sayyaf, which did not materialize because of an impediment in the Philippine constitution.²⁴⁴

The U.S. remains consistent with its hard stance against the terrorists and in giving the MILF the chance for peace, which has proved helpful so far. Amidst several bombings in 2003 in Mindanao cities, the GRP and the U.S. demanded that the MILF sever its ties with the terrorist groups or else it will be included on the terror list. As a

²⁴¹ USIP Special Report, The Mindanao Peace Talks, 7.

²⁴² CRS Report for U.S. Congress, "Terrorism in South East Asia," (05 Oct 2004), 17-21, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/35595.pdf> on (accessed 13 Oct 05).

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

result, the MILF immediately renounced terrorism as a means for its armed struggle, and denied its link with terrorist groups operating in Mindanao. This led to the resumption of the peace negotiations.²⁴⁵ As discussed earlier in chapter II, there were strong reports that the JI was provided training camps within MILF territories from 1994 to the year 2000. Surely the potential gains for the peaceful settlement of the conflict and the great consequence of being regarded as a terrorist organization are more than enough reasons for the MILF to submit to the demand. Definitely, the U.S. commitment provides a greater chance of success to the peace process because of its capability to provide development assistance and to coerce parties of the conflict to remain on the peace track.

The U.S. interest in the peace process was also based on the official request of the Philippine government and the separate appeal of the MILF in the year 2003. President Arroyo asked President Bush for assistance in the peace process during her state visit. For his part, the late Salamat Hashim wrote a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush appealing for the U.S. to correct what the MILF saw as an error of the U.S. in including Mindanao in the Philippine Republic when it was granted independence in 1946.²⁴⁶ The U.S. positively responded to the request for assistance in the peace process and made clear its following policies in June 2003.

The content of the letter emphasizes, first and foremost: (1) the U.S. commitment to the territorial integrity of the Philippines; (2) recognition of serious legitimate grievances of the Muslims in Southern Philippines that must be addressed; (3) the U.S. desire to see an end to the violence and its effort to assist the Republic of the Philippines in addressing the root causes of the problem; (4) U.S. concern about the links of the MILF with terrorist organizations and its demand that those links be severed immediately; (5) readiness to support politically and financially, a bona fide peace process between the GRP and MILF; (6) recognition of and cooperation with the Malaysian government as the third party facilitator of conflict resolutions; (7) endorses the USIP as the support mechanism for the peace process in coordination with

²⁴⁵ ICG Report, 25.

²⁴⁶ Santos Jr., 51.

Malaysia.²⁴⁷ Clearly, the U.S. does not support an independent Bangsamoro Islamic state in Mindanao, but it is willing to help in the peaceful settlement of the conflict and in addressing the MILF's legitimate concerns politically and economically.

The U.S.' deep historical connection with the Philippines and its economic interest also provide the motivation for the U.S. to get involved in the resolution of the MILF conflict. As a former colonial state of the U.S., the Philippines have shared a history and commitment to democratic principles, as well as direct human links. The country's governmental institutions are modeled after the U.S. government, except for not being a federal republic. There are approximately 2 million Americans of Filipino roots in the United States and there are more than 130,000 Americans in the Philippines.²⁴⁸ On the economic side, trade between both countries in 2004 accounted for \$16.2 billion, of which 16% of the Philippine imports came from the U.S. and 18% of its exports went to the United States. The Philippines is currently ranked as the U.S.' 21st biggest export market and its 21st largest exporter. Traditionally, the U.S. has been the Philippines' largest investor, which accounts for the \$6.3 billion investment at the end of 2004.²⁴⁹ On the average, the Philippines are visited by almost 400,000 Americans every year. In the year 2003, Filipinos living in the United States remitted about \$4.1 billion to their relatives and friends in the Philippines.²⁵⁰

The RP-US relations weakened in 1991 when the Philippine Senate voted for the termination of the land lease for two large U.S. military bases: Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base, located north of Manila. However, the situation gradually normalized and has improved significantly after the 9/11 incident. The Philippines came ahead of other countries to offer its cooperation with the U.S. War on Terror in 2001. It

²⁴⁷ Macapanton E Abbas, Jr., "Is a Bangsamoro State within a Federation the Solution?" *Ateneo Law Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 2, (September 2003), pp. 290-368, cited from Soliman M. Santos, "Dynamics and Directions of the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front," (2004), 51-52, <http://cpn.nd.edu/Dynamics%20of%20GRP-MILF%20Peace%20.pdf> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

²⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Background Note on the Philippines," (September 2005), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2794.htm#relations> (accessed 09 Oct 05).

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

also sent a military contingent to the coalition forces against Iraq in 2003. The U.S., on its part, supported the Philippines by providing training and equipment to the Philippine military who were then engaged with local terrorists in Mindanao. The Philippines was declared a major non-NATO ally by the U.S. during President Arroyo's state visit in May 2003.²⁵¹ In a national sampling survey conducted by the Social Weather Station on 14 September 2004, 78% of Filipinos believe that a good relationship with the U.S. is important to the country's development, 73% say good relations with the U.S. is important in protecting the Philippines from international terrorists, 62% agree on maintaining the support of the U.S. against the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao, and 22% of Filipinos have been found to have relatives in the U.S.²⁵²

There are two U.S. independent institutions that are technically capable of undertaking peace building initiatives: the U.S. Institute of Peace and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The U.S. Institute of Peace has been closely monitoring and supporting the peace process after President Arroyo asked President Bush for assistance in the peace process during her state visit in 2003. Since mid-2003, the USIP has acted as an active on-the-ground facilitator between the GRP and the MILF by conducting studies and consultations in Mindanao. These studies were done in the interest of exploring various ways and means to help find solutions to the conflict. Relevant to the most contentious issue of the substantive agenda in the peace process is the recent research sponsored by the USIP on the issue of ancestral domain.²⁵³ It is also in close coordination with the civil society organizations in Mindanao, including the media, on how to generate popular support for the peace process. It sees the need to nurture the popularity of the peace process in order to develop awareness and commitment among the people of Mindanao and concerned policy makers. It has

²⁵¹ Major Non Nato Ally status provides Philippines the opportunity to work together with the U.S. on military research and development and greater access to U.S. defense equipment and supplies. CRS Report for Congress, "Terrorism in South East Asia," 17- 21, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/35595.pdf> (accessed 18 Oct 05).

²⁵² Mahar Mangahas, "SWS 3rd Quarter Survey: Economic Hopes, Security Concerns, Family Ties Boster Filipino desire for Good relations with the U.S.," 1-2, <http://www.sws.org.ph/pr140904.htm> on (accessed 18 Oct 05).

²⁵³ US Institute of Peace, "U.S. interest in the Peace Process," Philippine Facilitation Project, http://www.usip.org/philippines/reports/mindanao_martin.html (accessed 14 Oct 05).

expressed its commitment to assist in the post conflict social and economic development of Mindanao, once a peace agreement is signed.²⁵⁴ In the year 2003, the USIP offered \$ 30 million for development programs in Mindanao in the event that a peace agreement is reached.²⁵⁵ However, the fund was forfeited in 2004 because of budgetary policies on fiscal appropriations. The fund was not tapped in the period it was appropriated due to a non-signing of a peace agreement in that year, so it was taken back by the U.S. government at the end of the budget fiscal period.²⁵⁶

Unknown to many, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been helping former MNLF rebels develop small-scale farms to improve their living conditions on a self-sustaining basis. It was responsible for developing the micro-financing capability of at least 97 local banks in order to provide micro-financing services to the former MNLF combatants, which benefited some 8,000 in 2002.²⁵⁷ In 2004, it has considered a \$50 million grant facility for development projects in the conflict affected areas in Mindanao, aside from the \$20 million intended for the re-integration of the MILF.²⁵⁸

C. LIBYA

The support of Libya in the peaceful resolution of the conflict is significant because of its deep historical connection to the conflict and its influence over the Moros of Mindanao. Similar to Malaysia, Libya used to be a strong supporter of the Moro rebellion in the southern Philippines. It was a leader in rallying support among Muslim countries for the Moro rebellion in Mindanao. It provided arms and logistics to the armed struggle beginning in the early 1970s, which definitely heightened the intensity of

²⁵⁴ US Institute of Peace, "Philippine Facilitation Project," <http://www.usip.org/philippines/index.html> (accessed 18 Nov 05).

²⁵⁵ ICG Report, 8.

²⁵⁶ Transcript of Live Interview with U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone by Ricky Carandang on Philippine national television, July 7, 2004, <http://manila.usembassy.gov/wwwwhr329.html> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

²⁵⁷ "Philippine – American Ties: A new Partnership for Peace and Development," http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/us-phil_relations.htm#partnership (accessed 18 Oct 05).

²⁵⁸ "UN, European Community to help spur development in Mindanao," *Relief Web*. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/9d8053b8fd07809449256e2f00193a6b> (accessed 11 Oct 05).

fighting between the Philippine military and the Moro rebels. It is widely believed that the fighting could not have been so fierce and wide scale had Libya not provided the necessary logistics to the Moro rebels. The significance of its support for the peace process also creates a big impact. Starting in 1976, the intensity of the fighting gradually reduced after President Marcos opened diplomatic relations with Libya along with other Middle East countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Lebanon, Kuwait and Algeria.²⁵⁹ Libya became the primary mediator of the Tripoli agreement signed on behalf of the GRP and MNLF, wherein both parties agreed to granting autonomy to thirteen provinces of the Moros, rather than giving independence in 1976.²⁶⁰ Although the 1976 Tripoli agreement was short-lived, the fighting did not have the same intensity as in the early 1970s.

During the resumption of the peace talks between the GRP and the MILF in June 2001, Libya played host again and was in fact successful in achieving an agreement of peace. That agreement provided for the three substantive agendas of the peace negotiations: namely, security, rehabilitation and ancestral domain. The peace process has revolved on these three agenda since then. Libya also made clear its opposition to “dismemberment of Philippine territory by an independent Islamic state.”²⁶¹

Libya’s interest in the peace process may be considered purely altruistic and political, since it doesn’t have much of an economic or security agenda to pursue with the Philippines, except for labor force.²⁶² The conflict does not create an immediate effect on Libya, unlike in Malaysia wherein its security is threatened too by the conflict. More likely, its historical ties with the conflict and its commitment to help the Muslim brothers in the southern Philippines could be the main reasons for helping in the peaceful settlement of the conflict. On the political side, sponsoring peaceful settlements of conflict rather than sponsoring violent armed struggles (that has characterized the image of Libya in the past) will have a positive effect on its image in the international

²⁵⁹ David, 83.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 85.

²⁶¹ Santos Jr., 48.

²⁶² “Accord Mindanao: Profiles,” <http://www.c-r.org/accord/min/accord6/profiles.shtml> (accessed 11 Nov 05).

community. This may be the reason why Libya intervened for the release of the European citizens kidnapped from Sipadan, Malaysia and held hostage in Mindanao by the Abu Sayyaf in the year 2000.

D. THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

The support of the OIC in the peace process with the Moros is crucial to its success because of the Moros' identification with the world *ummah* community and its historical connection to the conflict. The OIC enjoys legitimacy among the Moros because it represents the Muslim countries that may be supporting their causes. It was particularly involved in the investigation of the Moros' plight in Mindanao in 1972, during the height of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims, and subsequently acted as mediator in the conflict. It also facilitated development initiatives among oil rich Muslim countries for the Moros in Mindanao, with Libya and Saudi Arabia in the lead.²⁶³ Like the US, Malaysia and Libya, the OIC has been consistent in its policy of supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state as mentioned in the sixth Islamic summit in Dakar, Senegal in 1991.²⁶⁴

The OIC can now have a more direct participation in the peaceful settlement of the conflict because the MNLF and the MILF have finally heeded its call for solidarity. In the past, the OIC could not play a direct role with the GRP-MILF peace process, due to its political recognition of the MNLF as the legitimate representative of the Moros in Mindanao. In fact, the monitoring team in Mindanao was called as international monitoring team and not an OIC monitoring team, despite coming from OIC member countries.²⁶⁵ With the signing of the "agreement of unity" between the MNLF and the MILF in Malaysia in the year 2001, it can now actively support the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Definitely, the OIC's support for the peaceful resolution of the conflict enhances legitimacy of the peace process and its outcome. It can also help generate significant support from member Muslim countries to provide the much needed funds for development projects in Mindanao.

²⁶³ David., 85.

²⁶⁴ David., 48-49.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 50.

E. UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD BANK

The UN has not directly been involved in the peace negotiations between the GRP and the MILF, and its bystander attitude has not been healthy to the early peaceful resolution of the conflict. In September 2003, President Arroyo was offered assistance by Secretary Kofi Annan in finding a comprehensive, peaceful and lasting political solution to the MILF, but nothing concrete has come out of the offer.²⁶⁶ Presumably, the UN is comfortable with how the peace negotiations are progressing through the facilitation of Malaysia and other support groups. However, the MILF's demand for a UN sponsored referendum for independence begs for the official stand of the United Nations. Its official declaration against the conduct of referendum for the Moros' independence will improve the prospect of early resolution because this will certainly influence the political stand of the GRP and MILF. Its clear stand on the issue will definitely guide both sides of the conflict in their peace negotiations. Thus, a UN decision not to support the MILF's quest for independence will put the issue to rest. Certainly, its political position on the issue will help with the speedy resolution of the conflict and at the same time provide legitimacy for the political solution.

Despite its complacent attitude to the conflict resolution, the UN has been actively involved in finding solutions to the Mindanao problem. Likewise, the UN Development Program has been an active partner in the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF. It helps to achieve the vision of peace and development through the multi-donor program.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, it has conducted at least six assessment missions to Mindanao that provide valuable input to the peace process, especially the fifth assessment mission report by Paul Oquist. This proposed the need to prioritize the human security framework over the national security framework in view of the poor social conditions of the area.²⁶⁸ Such input is very relevant considering the poor security and unfavorable economic conditions of the affected areas in Mindanao.

²⁶⁶ Santos Jr., 53.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

The World Bank's participation is confined to the economic development aspect of the peace process, particularly in generating funds to support the peace settlement. It has taken the lead of a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) for the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development of the war-devastated areas in Mindanao. So far, a most concrete action made by the WB is the conduct of joint needs assessment (JNA) that deals with the areas of human development, finance and private sector, rural development, governance and institutions.²⁶⁹ Just like in other post-conflict undertakings for peace and development, there is a big need for donor countries to provide funds to finance valuable projects and job opportunities to the people in the community. What has also been concrete and helpful is the decision of the donor countries to provide the development aid after the final peace agreement is signed between the GRP and the MILF.²⁷⁰ Such a policy serves as an impetus for both sides of the conflict to stick to the negotiated settlement track. The same policy is being observed by Japan, which is assisting bilaterally. Japan has been increasingly involved in providing development assistance to Mindanao. It has pledged a total of US \$400 million to support the peace and development of Mindanao. In a speech delivered to the MILF's General Assembly in May 2005, Taeko Takahashi, a high level Japanese official to the Philippines, emphasized the need for peace before development could flourish. She reiterated Japan's continuing support for development in Mindanao should the MILF remain on the peace track.²⁷¹

The convergence of these offers of development assistance from the donor countries should make it difficult for the MILF to abandon the peaceful settlement track as it sees the huge potential economic gains in the future.

²⁶⁹ Santos Jr., 54.

²⁷⁰ "UN, European Community to help spur development in Mindanao," *Relief Web*, (02 Feb 2004), <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/9d8053b8fd07809449256e2f00193a6b> (accessed 11 Nov 05).

²⁷¹ "Japan Pledges \$400 million for Peace and development of Mindanao," *Relief Web*, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/VBOL-6CXJCZ?OpenDocument> (accessed 11 Nov 05).

F. CONCLUSION

The GRP-MILF peace process has received significant attention from other countries and intergovernmental institutions which are now rendering various ways of support. This participation of external actors enhances the legitimacy of the peace process and its potential political solution in the future. Furthermore, the expressed support of the U.S., Malaysia, Libya, and the OIC for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine Republic helps promote the acceptability of a political solution other than independence because it de-popularizes, if not de-legitimizes, the issue of independence.

So far, the involvement of third parties has proven very effective. It has aided the GRP-MILF in stabilizing the security conditions on the ground and carefully advanced the peace negotiations. This multinational involvement was definitely absent during the peace talks with the MILF in 1997 to 2000, which may be blamed for the peace talks' failure and the escalation of violence that happened. In the history of the Moro rebellion, peace agreements were achieved in 1976 and 1996 with the MILF through the facilitation of Libya and Indonesia respectively. On the other hand, the absence of a third party facilitator was proven dangerous in the GRP-MILF negotiations from 1997 to year 2000. Both sides failed to develop a collaborative problem solving attitude, and instead maintained a competing rivalry characterized by mistrust and gaining advantage over the other. So far, Malaysia has been effective in its role, given the current success of both sides to reach several agreements to stabilize the security condition and promote the talks near to the final settlement.

Malaysia will continue to support the peaceful resolution of the conflict with the MILF because it sees Mindanao as vital to its own security and socio-economic stability. As seen in the past incidents, it is affected by the huge migration of Moros fleeing the fighting because they impact on Sabah's demography and also reduces economic opportunities for the Sabahans. More importantly, it is threatened by the growing lawlessness in Mindanao due to the conflict. Incidents in the past have shown the intrusion of pirates and terrorists on Malaysian soil. Thus Malaysia would prefer to have a more stable Mindanao because this will definitely mean a more secured environment for its part.

The Malaysian support for the peaceful settlement of the conflict has a significant effect in achieving sustainable peace in Mindanao. It has been noted in the past that Malaysia was a major supporter of the Bangsamoro armed struggle for independence, as it provided sanctuary, training and equipment to the Moro rebels, especially during the time of Tun Mustapha in the 1970s.²⁷² Today, the armed struggle for independence has not only lost a major supporter, but is greatly weakened by Malaysia's active involvement in the peace process. Similarly, the support of Libya for the peaceful resolution of the conflict provides better chances for achieving sustainability of peace in Mindanao. Libya was also a major supporter of the Moro armed rebellion in the past. Its change of policy from providing the rebels with the means to fight to supporting the peaceful solution decreases the capability of the MILF to wage another wide scale armed struggle.

The United States will always be willing to participate in the peaceful settlement of the conflict with the MILF because its success will have a positive impact on its Global War on Terror. Peace with the MILF will lessen the terrorists' recruitment base and deny them freedom of movement in MILF controlled areas. Moreover, if the MILF will be co-opted to fight against terrorists, its members can be helpful in providing vital intelligence information about the terrorists. Furthermore, the United States will always be committed on the war on terror in Mindanao because of its big number of citizens living and visiting in the Philippines that need to be protected from terrorist attacks, not to mention some economic interest discussed in this chapter. Thus, it is more likely a willing partner to consolidate peace in the post-conflict environment of Mindanao. Its commitment to Philippine security had already been seen in the robust military exercise codenamed "Balikatan" (shoulder to shoulder) in the year 2002. It has also been committed to providing a substantial amount of resources and huge military forces for combined training, which directly and indirectly helped the Philippine military in the fight against the ASG.²⁷³

²⁷² Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar, 559.

²⁷³ CRS Report, 18.

By looking at the peace settlement as part of the war against terror, the United States may take the lead role of a multinational peace keeping force in the implementation phase of the agreement, particularly regarding the security aspect of either disarmament, demobilization or integration of the MILF rebels to GRP military and police, as may be agreed upon in the peace process. As the world's leading superpower, it has the capability to support peace and development programs of the peace agreement due to its huge resources, and the military capability to coerce both adversaries to remain committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, a role that Malaysia may neither be willing to perform nor effectively assume.

The economic development assistance from the international community, through the facilitation of the UN and World Bank of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Mindanao, creates an irresistible force for encouraging the MILF to embrace the road to peace. Considering the region as the poorest among other regions of the country, economic development remains a great aspiration of the people in Mindanao. Other countries' significant contributions for development assistance, including that of Japan, would be very influential for the GRP and MILF to fulfill the consolidation of peace. Libya and the OIC will remain supportive to the peace process and provide development assistance because of their historical and religious connections with the Moros. The UN and the WB is crucial in facilitating the use of the needed contributions of donor countries in order to implement developmental projects. Undoubtedly, the support of these countries and international government institutions positively impact in the prospect for sustainable peace between the GRP and MILF.

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V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SUMMARY

The contemporary MILF rebellion is mainly part of an ethno-nationalistic struggle of the Moros for independence that originated from a combination of factors. Its grievance issue is mainly traced to the state's settlement programs for Christians and land policies that caused the socio-political and economic marginalization of the Moros, as they have become the minority group with very little land left to them in their homeland. This culminated in the massacre of 31 young Moro recruits on Corregidor Island by the military in 1968, which became the mobilizing opportunity to popularize the issue of independence among the Moros. The MNLF emerged in 1969 and started to wage the armed struggle in the 1970s. In 1976 it entered into a peace agreement with the Philippine government through the effective mediation of Libya. However, it was a failure because Marcos and Misuari had opposing views on the agreement's implementation. Twenty years after, President Ramos turned out successful in reviving the peace talks and signing a final peace agreement in 1996 which provides for wider political powers and development programs for the Moros. Misuari's compromise on the issue of independence in 1976 stirred serious rift in the leadership. In 1977, the MILF broke away from the MNLF due to ideological differences. It did not want to compromise the issue of independence, unlike the MNLF. Furthermore, the MILF wanted to make Islam the center of governance. The period of the conflict, which saw the rise of sectarian violence in the early 1970s, further deepened animosities and racial prejudices among Christians and Moros. Since then, mistrust characterizes the kind of social relationship between Christians and Moros, not only in Mindanao but it is likely for the whole country as well.

Apparently, the intensity of the fighting would not have been very fierce and large scale had it not been for the support of the external actors. Libya and Malaysia provided the means by which the Moros were able to put up its armies, acquire weapons and equipment, and establish sanctuary in Sabah. This suggests that the best way to address the insurgency was to gain the support of the external actors for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. President Marcos had this in mind in the early 1970s when he initiated

diplomatic relations with the OIC, more particularly with Libya. He was able to co-opt Libya into a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which resulted in the 1976 Tripoli agreement. Although the peace agreement failed in the implementation phase, the renewed fighting never had the same intensity as before. Twenty years later, involving another third party (Indonesia) in the conflict resolution still proved effective. President Ramos successfully reached a final peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996. Perhaps one of the reasons why the peace negotiations with the MILF failed in the year 2000 may be attributed to the absence of a third party involvement.

Undoubtedly, the MILF is the main rebel group in Mindanao today and a peaceful settlement with it would improve the prospects for peace in Mindanao. The MILF has grown into a formidable guerilla force of 15,000, controlling large territories in central Mindanao. Since its formation, it has remained consistent to its twin goals of independence and establishing an Islamic state. Its mass base consists mainly of Maguindanaoans and Maranaos, and it also has supporters from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Malaysia. The MILF is now a politico-military organization. It has an executive council, a supreme Islamic court, and a legislative branch called Majilis al-Shura. Its Bangsamoro Islamic Army, which used to be organized into six territorial divisions before the major offensive by the military in the year 2000, is now organized into nine base commands with more or less six brigades each, and a separate special operations group.

B. CONCLUSION

The prospect for a sustainable peace between the GRP and the MILF is relatively good because of the following favorable conditions: the conflict seems ripe for resolution; the ceasefire is holding and the peace process has been progressing towards a negotiated political settlement; there is active support from the international community, particularly by Malaysia, acting as third party facilitator, and the U.S., which has expressed its support in the peace process and the commitment to act as a likely implementer of the final peace agreement in the future; and lastly, there is active participation of the civil society groups.

There are several factors in the MILF conflict that lend ripeness for resolution, but it is the condition of a mutually hurting stalemate that makes it more pronounced. The MILF has been badly weakened by the major hostilities in 2000 and the government has also been hurt by the loss of lives and the war's economic cost. There is no clear indication that continuing the fight would result in the victory or defeat of the other, but it is clear that resuming hostilities would create more undesirable outcomes for both groups. Experts estimate the cost of the three decade conflict in Mindanao at roughly \$2 - \$3 billion dollars with 120,000 deaths and millions of emigrants. It also contributed to the alarming poverty incidence among the populace in the region: 56 % in 1991, 62.5% in 1997, and 71.3 % in the year 2000.²⁷⁴ At the peak of the conflict with the MILF in the year 2000, the Philippine government suffered 200 soldiers killed in action and spent some \$20 million, with daily expenses ranging from \$200,000 to 400,000.²⁷⁵ On the part of the MILF, it lost many of its members and 50 of its camps to the military, including the main camps Bushra and Abu-bakar. It also caused the MILF's semi-conventional force to disperse into smaller units.²⁷⁶ Fighting was even more painful for them because the battle grounds are their communities. This creates far reaching effects on their relatives who were either caught in the crossfire or forced to stay at evacuation centers. Another deterring factor is the potentially catastrophic outcome due to the ethno-nationalistic color of the conflict. It should be remembered that the conflict is almost a proxy war between Christians and Muslims who have developed animosities towards each other over decades of struggle for resources and power.

Furthermore, the condition of widespread poverty provides a high interest in peace and development incentives that is incorporated in the security and rehabilitation agenda of the peace process. For the rebels, the potential economic gains of the peace process might be difficult incentives to resist. Lastly, the change in leadership due to the death of Hashim Salamat and the rise of Al Haj Murad as the new chairman provides for more flexibility in seeking other solutions, unlike his predecessor. Murad is not a

²⁷⁴ Schiavo-Campo, Slavatore & Mary Judd. "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Roots, Costs, and Potential Peace Dividend," *The World Bank*, paper no. 24. (February 2005), 5.

²⁷⁵ David, 103.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

religious leader, and he may be less committed to independence and Islamic state demands.²⁷⁷

The ceasefire on the ground is holding and the peace talks have been progressing. So far, there has been a dramatic decrease in ceasefire violations from both camps, due to the effective deployments of IMTs, LMTs, AHJAG, and the NGO based ceasefire watch, *bantay ceasefire*. These mechanisms monitor the ceasefire implementation on the ground and conducts fact finding missions on reported violations. The presence of these monitoring teams has kept both sides committed to the cessation of hostilities, which resulted in a marked decline of ceasefire violations.²⁷⁸ Likewise, some concrete actions have already been undertaken on the rehabilitation agenda, such as the creation of the Mindanao Multi-Donor Trust Fund by the World Bank and the creation of the Bangsamoro Development Agency. WB and BDA had already conducted a Joint Needs Assessments in the affected areas. Just recently, both panels reached an agreement on how to approach the most contentious agenda: the *ancestral domain* issue, although details of this have not been made available as of this time. The peace process is now leading towards the political solution of the conflict, which brings both panels to the issues of either independence, as the MILF desires, or a Bangsamoro state under a parliamentary federalist Philippines, which the government is willing to grant based on the recent political trend in the country.

The prospects for a sustainable peace between the GRP and MILF is further enhanced by the international attention it is getting from concerned countries and intergovernmental institutions that have various levels of involvement, such as Malaysia, the United States, Libya, the OIC, and the World Bank. Malaysia's effective facilitating role has guided both the GRP and MILF into achieving various agreements that have advanced the talks into the last agenda of ancestral domain and a negotiated political

²⁷⁷ USIP Special Report, "The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines," (January 2005), p.7, usip.org/specialreport/sr131.pdf#search=options (accessed 06 Sept 05).

²⁷⁸ Office of the Philippine Embassy to the United States, "Status of the GRP-MILF Peace Process," (08 February 2005), <http://www.usip.org/philippines/reports/rosario.pdf#search='status%20of%20the%20GRPMILF%20peace%20process'> (accessed 24 August 05).

solution to the conflict. It was responsible for assisting the peace panel in tackling the three substantive agendas of security, rehabilitation, and ancestral domain. Furthermore, it has committed the largest number of members to the IMT that have been deployed to Mindanao since October 2004, and expressed its willingness to assist in the technical development of the BDA.²⁷⁹

Malaysia will continue to actively support in the peaceful resolution of the conflict because it has clearly identified Mindanao as crucial to its own security and socio-economic concerns. It prefers to have a stable Mindanao neighbor because only then can it minimize the influx of Moros to Sabah, which affects in the demographics and tight competition for economic opportunities.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, a secured Mindanao environment will help prevent piracy and lawless elements from staging criminal activities in Malaysian territories, such as the case of the kidnapping of tourists in Sipadan, Malaysia in 2000. However, Malaysia is not likely to be seen as an effective implementer of the peace agreement in the future. This is because it does not have the capability of a great power that can make a long term commitment to deploy resources and troops in ensuring a party's compliance with the agreement during the implementation phase. Nevertheless, considering Mindanao as vital to its own security, it is more likely to be willing to commit a certain number of troops as part of a likely peace keeping force in the future. Undoubtedly, Malaysia's participation in the peace process is a big gain for the prospects of peace. In the past, the Moro rebels received training and equipment, and were provided sanctuary in Sabah, which contributed to the high intensity level of the armed struggle.²⁸¹

Similarly, the United States will continue to actively support the peaceful settlement of the conflict because it has identified Mindanao as vital to its own security. In view of its current Global War on Terror, the United States would not allow Mindanao's security condition to deteriorate further, becoming a major breeding ground of terrorists in Southeast Asia. A peaceful resolution of the MILF conflict will mean a

²⁷⁹ Santos, Jr., 45.

²⁸⁰ Paridah Abd. Samad and Darusalam Abu Bakar, 563.

²⁸¹ Tan, 267.

success for the GWOT because this will not only deny the JI and ASG terror groups from having access to MILF controlled areas, but it would also discourage a growing Islamic militancy in the region.²⁸²

The United States is highly capable of playing the role of an effective implementer, or one that may take the lead of a multi-national peace keeping force. The U.S. role as implementer is important because it can ensure that the GRP and the MILF stay honest to their peace agreement and to its implementation. It is capable to take the lead of a multi-national peace keeping force in Mindanao, especially in the disarmament, demobilization or integration of the MILF combatants into the regional security force. Likewise, the U.S. support for peace and development is also highly important because of its technical capability and resources. In fact, the USIP has initially allocated the amount of \$30 million for peace and development programs in Mindanao, in the event a peace agreement is signed between the GRP and MILF.²⁸³ Another U.S. government agency involved in peace building is the USAID, which has the capability to support economic development programs in the affected areas. The USAID has already been in Mindanao for several years, supporting the reintegration of the MNLF rebels into society through various livelihood programs since the signing of the GRP-MNLF peace agreement in 1996.²⁸⁴

The support of Libya, the OIC, the UN and the WB for the peace process adds hope for the prospects of sustainable peace. Like Malaysia, Libya was once a major supporter of the Moros' armed struggle in the past. Today, its support for the peaceful settlement of the conflict greatly diminishes the Moros' means to carry out the armed struggle. Furthermore, its influence over the Moros may help soften the stance of the MILF with its demand for independence. The support of the UN and the OIC as internationally recognized institutions provides legitimacy to the peace process and its settlement outcome. Given the poor economic conditions of the affected areas in

²⁸² USIP Special Report, 7.

²⁸³ ICG Report, 8.

²⁸⁴ "Philippine – American Ties: A new Partnership for Peace and Development," http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/us-phil_relations.htm#partnership (accessed 18 Oct 05).

Mindanao, the World Bank's support would definitely aid the rehabilitation and development programs for the people in the affected areas. More importantly, the expressed support of these countries and the OIC for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippines helps de-legitimize the MILF's quest for independence, which may likely influence the rebels to accept a compromise. Nevertheless, the UN must take a more active role in the peace process by helping clarify where it stands on the issue of the Moro independence, in order to guide the GRP and the MILF on the political solution to the problem.

Lastly, the active involvement of the civil societies in cultivating a culture of peace in the region gives a bright hope to the peace process. The *Mindanao Peace Weavers*, a coalition of about eight civil society groups supportive of the peace process, has been proven effective in developing popular support for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. It also acts as a pressure group for the GRP and MILF to continue working on the peace negotiations. In view of the ethno-religious character of the conflict, the *Bishop-Ulama Forum* plays a strategic role in bridging the gap between Christians and Muslims for peace because they have the means and influence over their people. The religious sector in the region has a wide network that permeates almost every locality. Christian churches and Muslim mosques are present in almost every municipality where people pray and listen to religious leaders.

Bangsamoro independence may not be the answer to the MILF conflict, given the reality of a social mix-up among Christians and Moros, regardless of which group is majority or minority in certain areas of Mindanao. Independence will not change the social and economic interactions between Christians and Moros, because they live in the same geographic locations in Mindanao. Separating them further by creating a sovereign Bangsamoro government may only enhance racial prejudices that may still result in a violent relationship. Definitely, the answer to the conflict should be developing a culture of peaceful co-existence by bridging the two main ethnic groups of the conflict, rather than segregating them any further. This can be done by incorporating a comprehensive reconciliation program in the final peace agreement of the GRP and MILF. This reconciliation program must allow wider participation of the civil society organizations,

particularly the interfaith group that would foster a culture of peace at the village and national level. It should also be incorporated in the school curriculum nationwide, such that there will be better understanding of each groups' cultural sensitivities. The military and the MILF rebels should also be designated as major components of this program, as well as concerned public officials in the local areas.

A Bangsamoro state under a Philippine federal republic may be a political solution. Time and again, the MILF has rejected the autonomy idea because of its failure to bring about peace and development, as in the case of the MNLF. In this case, pursuing an autonomy option faces a stigma of failure, which makes it hard for the MILF to accept. On the part of the government, it cannot compromise its territorial integrity because of the constitutional impediment, and its security and economic concerns. In this regard, the support of the international community for the territorial integrity of the Philippine republic should provide the direction towards the political solution. An independent Bangsamoro state cannot exist without international recognition because it is crucial to the legitimacy of an independent state. The United States, Libya, Malaysia and the OIC do not support an independent Bangsamoro state in Mindanao, but instead expressed that the problem should be solved within the context of Philippine sovereignty. None has come out to support an independent Bangsamoro state so far. Hence, the most viable political solution, assuming both stick to a collaborative problem solving approach, is the concept of a Muslim state under a Federal Republic of the Philippines. In this way, the Moros will be able to exercise greater political powers and adapt Islamic laws into the new polity with less national political intervention. Thus, the Moros' self-determination would be exercised and their rights would be more protected.

The issue of Moro landlessness remains as a valid issue of today. However, current laws about property rights are obstacles to retaking the lands from registered owners who cleared, cultivated, and nurtured the land for decades. Instead, an integrative solution must be pursued. The government should explore other means to provide lands to the Moros and support them with technical and financial assistance in order to make these lands economically productive. Collectively, the Moros should be allowed to regain control and manage their ancestral domain for their economic benefits. However, a

serious effort must be undertaken to develop local capacity in governance. In the past, the local governments in these affected areas were tainted by poor performance owing to issues of incompetence and corruption among local officials.²⁸⁵

Despite the good prospects, there are also certain issues that serve as obstacles to achieving sustainable peace, such as: the internal problems of the MILF; its consistent demand for an independent Islamic state; a lack of active support from the local Christian politicians; and the current national political crisis.

The MILF leadership must regain its cohesive control of the organization in order to preserve the gains of the peace process. In doing so, it must strengthen its grip over its field commanders and ensure their cooperation in the peaceful resolution of the conflict. In this way, the local commanders will be more compelled to observe the ceasefire agreement and actively prevent terrorists from operating in the MILF controlled areas. The reported ties with JIs may endanger the MILF's chances for the peace process because this may cause them to be placed on the terror list. When this happens, the peace dialogue will break down and turn into a resumption of hostilities, this time with the aid of the United States in view of its GWOT. Hence, the MILF should take the lead in arresting these terrorists within its areas of control or offer information about their whereabouts. Only then can it show its sincere renouncement of terrorism, and demonstrate that its reported ties with terrorists are untrue. It should also harmonize the relationship of Maranaos and Maguindanaoans, who largely comprise the MILF, in order to prevent factionalism that has been noted during the selection of the new chairman when Salamat Hashim died in 2003.²⁸⁶ One way to keep the harmony is to keep the balance of the two ethnic groups in key positions of the organization.

The MILF's consistent demand for a UN sponsored referendum for independence only shows a potential stalemate in the future talks of the GRP-MILF peace panels. So

²⁸⁵ In most affected areas in Mindanao, there is poor quality of local governance. Municipal halls are not performing public offices. Most mayors would treat their municipal funds as their personal money to dole out to their relatives and constituent supporters. In some cases, these monies end up in their pockets. Furthermore, some of these mayors usually stay longer in the cities than on their constituent areas. The author developed this observation when he was assigned in Basilan, Sulu, and Lanao del Sur as a field officer of the Philippine Marine Corps.

²⁸⁶ ICG Report, 9.

far, the MILF seems determined to pursue UN participation on this issue. This may likely cause a delay owing to the bureaucratic process of UN intervention. This may also be unacceptable to the GRP, which has been willing to give anything, except independence. Hence, a worst case scenario that may occur is for the GRP-MILF to revert back to the hard, competitive attitude on the issue of independence. On the other hand, non-involvement of the UN to resolve the issue of independence will serve as an impetus for the pro-independence Moros to de-legitimize the political outcome of the ongoing peace process, and still insist for the UN intervention.

The absence of the influential Mindanao Christian political leaders in the peace process is an indication of their bystander attitude, which may become a problem in the implementation of the agreement in the future. Known provincial and municipal leaders have been opposed to giving concessions to the Moros in the past²⁸⁷ and their non-participation in the peace process only shows they may not be willing to implement terms of peace agreements in the future. Lastly, the national political crisis is not in any way helpful to the peace process, except for hastening the shift towards a parliamentary federal republic that may pave the way for a Bangsamoro state. The crisis may undermine the government's legitimacy to enter into a final peace agreement with the rebels, owing to the decreasing popularity of the present government. Likewise, concessions to the Moros will be likely targets of criticism by the President's political opponents. What is worse, a serious political crisis that may result in the toppling of the incumbent President will definitely draw back the peace negotiations.

C. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the positive developments of the peace process towards signing a comprehensive peace agreement between the GRP and the MILF, it is recommended that the potential peace agreement allows for the participation of external actors in the implementation phase of the peace agreement. The agreement should invite a multinational peace keeping force led by a major power country that has a stake in achieving sustainable peace in the region. The peace keeping force will serve as a third party implementer of the agreement, especially on the security issue of disarmament,

²⁸⁷ Santos Jr., 44.

demobilization and reintegration of the rebel combatants, or in the integration of these rebels into a regional security and police forces. Secondly, the peace agreement must also provide for establishing and implementing a comprehensive reconciliation program in Mindanao. This would be intended to heal the long standing animosities and racial prejudices between Christians and Muslims at the grassroots level, in which the military and the MILF rebels should also be part of the undertaking. This should be done by creating a Mindanao Reconciliation Commission that will spearhead this program. Lastly, the economic development of the affected areas should be composed of short term and long term projects that would create immediate impact and sustainable growth. It must provide immediate employment to the rebels and their families, coupled with building infrastructures. In this regard, the Bangsamoro development agency must be fully prepared and supported by the Philippine government and the external parties.

In addition, the Philippine government must involve the regional and local political leaders in Mindanao, be they Christians or Muslims, at certain levels or areas in the peace process in order to develop among them ownership of the political solution. In this way, they will have greater commitment to the implementation of the agreements in the future.

The Philippine government should actively support the civil society organizations in their efforts to develop ownership of the peaceful resolution of the conflict among the Filipino people. This can be done by initiating dialogues and public debates to discuss the issues in local and national fora. In this regard, the government can use its own media networks or sponsor other media outfits in popularizing the peace track.

The national government may develop a sponsor support program wherein progressive cities in the country, which are mostly majority a Christian majority, can be tapped to act as partners for development in the affected areas. This can be done by allowing these cities to adopt a municipality of their choice and assist it in areas of governance and development. This process would definitely help bring about closer relationship and enhance the chances of the affected areas for development.

The road to peace between the GRP and MILF is definitely wider than ever before due to the existing favorable conditions seen in this study. Both sides have already shown greater commitment to resolve the conflict peacefully as shown by their collaborative behavior at the negotiating table and in implementing the ceasefire on the ground. Their efforts are being strengthened by the active involvement of civil society organizations, external countries, and international institutions supporting the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Hence, to borrow the words of Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, “Peace is partly at hand!”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, “Peace is Partly at Hand,” *Mindanews* (05 June 2005), <http://www.mindanews.com/2005/06/05vws-murad-milf.html> (accessed 16 Sept 05).

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